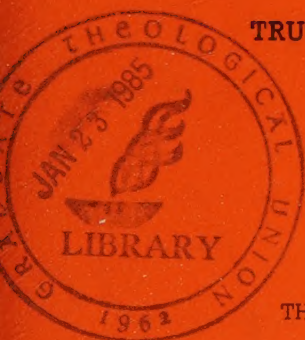


JEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION



TRUTH THAT SETS US FREE

JESUS THE TRUTH

Mathew Vellanickal

THE TRUTH THAT SETS US FREE

Samuel Rayan

TRUTH'S APPEAL FOR GANDHI

T. K. John

THE TRUTH OF THE PEOPLE

Little Brothers of Jesus

CHURCH, A PILLAR OF TRUTH

Felix Wilfred

MAY 1984

JEEVADHARA

is published every month
alternately in English and Malayalam

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JEEVADHARA
The Living Christ

TRUTH THAT SETS US FREE

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Editorial

This issue of *Jeevadhara* brings you, not without a measure of hesitancy, a modest offering of meditations and reflections on a subject which is at once vital and delicate: the question of Truth. One dare not touch it, it is so complex, difficult, sensitive, elusive; one cannot, nonetheless, but take it up, it is so central to life, so gripping, so urgent. Truth is what gives authenticity and substance to our persons as well as to all our mental and social creations. We are always concerned and anxious about the truth of it all. And yet we are at the same time aware of the fact that it is here we all fail in some measure or other, and it is here we are most prone to dissimulate and pretend. The contents of this volume do not claim to be above or outside this human predicament. What is said here is therefore submitted as tentative, partial, steps in a long journey, part of the vast quest in which humankind, the churches and religions included, are engaged.

Mathew Vellanickal's article on "Jesus the Truth" is an exposition of Jn 14:6 wherein Jesus says; "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". It is through the Incarnation that the Word became the "Truth", as only the incarnated Word can reveal to us his divine love. The Truth that Jesus brings is, so to say, embodied in the Word made flesh. "The Truth that Sets us Free" by Samuel Rayan, seeks to understand Jesus' claim to be the Truth. An attempt is made to follow, in general outline, the historical process by which Jesus chose to become the truth of God's saving relationship to us in our history. The Jesus-Truth is seen to be concrete, historical, action-based and oriented towards the transformation of the world and the liberation of the people. This is followed by a brief account of a modern servant of Truth whom the world has taken note of. T. K. John presents the salient aspects of Gandhi's conception of Truth and draws out the consequences of his view for religion, scriptures, traditions, no less than for economic and political life and social organization. The article shows awareness of problems in

Gandhi's position, especially the idealist character of Gandhian Truth and Non-Violence. But the purpose of the article is to call attention to a challenge: the challenge of his person and life lives and presses upon us. Its weight is particularly felt by those who profess to be the followers of Jesus.

While these two articles bear on the intimate relation between Jesus the Truth and Gandhi, on the one hand, and the people, the poor and their liberation, on the other, the Little Brothers of Jesus offer us a leaf from their life right in the midst of the people, in the depths of the people's truth. This lets us have a glimpse into the life of the poor, and into their values, problems and heart-resources which operate behind, within, those lives.

There follows a personal reflection on the way Jesus the Truth is followed and allowed to be present among us christians, especially in the organised community called the Church. We would do well to sit and listen quietly to Felix Wilfred, and then raise questions and engage him in a discussion of the major points he raises. For we share a common concern that, at all levels of life, especially at leadership levels of Church and State, a fresh commitment to and quest for the living Truth of things and of the people and a profounder reverence for it should be developed and sustained.

Christ is the Truth and the community in each place is his Body or the historical expression and process of his Truth-Self led by his Spirit poured out upon all. In the last days of the Risen Lord and his Spirit, every one shall "know" God and brother shall not say to brother, Come I'll teach you, but all will bear witness to one another and to the world. The Spirit of God is active in the whole of humankind and speaks to us from beyond all offices and organisations; and to know God is to do justice and to love, and true orthodoxy is orthopraxis.

This volume is about faith questions we put to ourselves as we sit before Jesus and look at him as he says, I am the Truth which sets people free; if you cannot believe my words, believe the works and the wounds which you may, here, touch.

Church - a Pillar of Truth

Some Reflections

Let me begin these reflections with recalling a personal experience. I began my study of philosophy at the age of seventeen in a Roman University with a markedly Scholastic orientation. At the end of three years of philosophy, I was so enamoured of Thomism and so encouraged by my success - securing three gold medals - that I thought I should dedicate my life to it and be back in India to be a champion of Thomism!

This period of reasoning and intellectual satisfaction was followed by a period of conflict when I started theology in the year 1968. Apart from the fact that the whole theological methodology pursued did not have much appeal to me, I was particularly troubled by a thesis in Ecclesiology: *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*, "outside the Church there is no salvation". I listened with great attention to my revered professor who had been a *peritus* or expert at Vat II. I also read a chapter in Congar's *Sainte Eglise* where he explains the history of this axiom.

All through the course, in the lecture hall as well as in private conversation with the professor, I raised questions as to how this axiom which denies salvation to those outside the Church could be still retained when Vatican II clearly states that truth and salvation are found also outside the visible precincts of the Church and that even atheists could be saved (L.G. 16). The answer given by my professor, which I think is typical of the official Church in many matters, was that the formula was still true and that only a development in its sense had taken place. The underlying assumptions seemed to be that the

Church could not err and therefore it has not erred, that what it teaches today has always been taught and that there can be no contradiction. I tried to argue with him, saying that the Church should honestly drop this outworn formula as erroneous and admit candidly that it has changed its position. For, I pointed out that it was impossible to reconcile what Vatican II has taught regarding truth and salvation outside the Church, with the interpretation of Fulgentius, a disciple of Saint Augustine, who said that all those who are outside the Church - pagans, Jews, heretics and schismatics - would go to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, an interpretation which enjoyed the approval of the Church and was a driving force behind the missionary enterprise. I must certainly have been a thorn in my professor's flesh. He became so impatient with me that he said that I was too young to understand. But I must confess that even after sixteen years of study and reflection in theology I have not understood his point.

Truth fenced - Truth offended

What really makes the Church a *pillar of truth* (I Tim. 3:15) is not the fact that the Church has never changed its position but that the Church is founded on the living truth of Jesus. But when truth becomes a possession of the Church-institution, there is greater pre-occupation to safeguard the position of the institution lest it should appear to have erred than to maintain, in a living way, the truth of Jesus and the truth of his Gospel.

The credibility of the Church will only increase and in no way decrease by admitting that the Church is a community of the disciples of Jesus, which wants to grow daily in the understanding of truth, led by his Spirit. A Church which ceases to follow the truth of Jesus and its implications, but arrogates to be the depository of all truths, once and for all, would cease to be the Church of Jesus Christ and the Church of the Spirit.

To the Church's claim of possessing truth, culture, salvation, heaven, corresponded an attitude of superiority and arrogance and racial prejudices of the West vis - à - vis the peoples of Africa and Asia. The colonial powers and the Church felt it their sacred vocation to bring knowledge, culture and salvation to the peoples who were in ignorance, in barbarity and in the danger of being eternally lost in hell. The West acted on its own prejudices without making any serious effort to come into contact with the truth of these peoples, their faith, their perceptions of life, their sentiments, art and culture. Even the sporadic efforts of people like Robert De Nobili and Matteo Ricci met with reprobation and accusation. The military and political dominance of the West was certainly bolstered up by the theology of the times which identified truth with the religion and the culture of the whites.

The same intolerance towards the truth of other peoples and their God-experiences was shown to the 'infidels at home' - the Moslems and the Jews. A holy zeal to defend the truth of Christianity no less than hope of gain, spurred on popes and saints and christian kings to embark on the crusades, the story of which is too well known to need description. How tragic it is that the defence of religious truth in the name of Jesus should involve aggressive wars and death of many millions in battelfields, in journeys, through exhaustion and plague. In the Frankish Empire a Jew had to choose between baptism and banishment. But at the time of the Crusades it became an option between baptism and death. It was the intolerant attitude of the Church which forced the Jews to attend sermons on the passion during the Holy Week and led to the popular custom of slapping the chief Rabbi on Good Friday.

In short, the position of the Church towards the truth of other peoples has been very ambiguous. Where the Church was in a minority it defended its religious freedom to propagate and expand, and where it was the majority it would not tolerate the religious minorities.

The argument to support this was clear and definite: *the error has no right to exist*. Every other confession or religion was supposed to be error in contrast to the truth which the Church was; they should therefore be either conquered or suppressed.

The above principle was behind the Church's negative attitude to the Sacred Books of other peoples in which they find the truths that inspire their life and conduct. Pope Gregory IX, on the basis of thirty five charges against the Talmud submitted to him by extremist churchmen, issued a circular to confiscate copies of it on the First Saturday of Lent in 1240. Public burning of the Talmud and other rabbinical writings was a popular custom in the Medieval and Counter-Reformation period in Europe. The Jews were even prohibited to read their writings by Pope Eugene IV through a bull.

Fanaticism is of various kinds and they all stem basically from the pretension of possessing the whole truth exclusively within one's narrow precincts. There is no readiness to discern, much less appreciate the truth of others. But the worst type of all fanaticism is, perhaps, the one which wants the weeds of untruth to be removed and consigned to fire immediately. It does not mind if in the process many tender shoots of truth are crushed underfoot. It is difficult in the field of human life and history, to distinguish clearly the wheat from the weeds. Truth and falsehood, lights and shadows, wheat and weeds exist intermingled. The Church has then to follow the wisdom indicated by Jesus in his parable (Mt. 13:24-30) and let them both be. The fruits will show what is true and what is false.

But in fact the Church has been far from following this injunction of Jesus. Has not many a sincere seeker of truth been too quickly labelled as 'heretic' by the official Church and harassed and consigned to torture and prison? Giordano Bruno, a man of subtle intelligence and understanding, had to perish by fire for propounding

innovative ideas. Thomas Campanella another great thinker who wrote the 'City of the Sun', had to pay for his thoughts with twenty seven years of confinement in a dark dungeon. Some of those accused of heresy did not have peace, not even in their graves. There were cases when the bodies of 'heretics' were exhumed and burned. Ironically, the inquisitional procedures and condemnations ending in horrible torture and death of heretics as carried out in Rome, Seville, Aragon and in Spanish and Portuguese colonies, were called *autos da fe* - acts of faith!

We know about the 'heretics' only from the point of view of the Church and from its polemical writings which condemned them and pronounced *anathema*. A totalitarian perspective of truth as adopted by the Church has silenced and oppressed valid elements of truth which would have contributed to enhance the truth of the Gospel and its understanding. For honesty's sake, a history of the Church should be written from the point of view of the so called 'heretics' and of the victims of the system. It may, then, reveal how it was not so much a quest of Gospel truth as of political interests that were at work in the condemnations and the killings.

It is *anathema* which prevented people like Simone Weil - a seeker of truth, to prefer to remain outside the Church in sympathy with all those condemned and excommunicated without their points of view being given a just hearing. Many of them condemned as heretics, were men who in all sincerity and with passion adhered to the truth of the Gospel and felt driven by an inner urge to resist the inconsistencies within the Church and to criticize in strong terms, its deviation from the truth of Jesus. Often the so called heresies were occasioned precisely because the Church was negligent of certain fundamental and vital truths. In the eyes of God and the world, what is more contemptible, is the way in which people who do not conform to the system are treated than the heresy of which they are accused.

It was the unwillingness of the Church to see the truth of nature and of science which brought it in collision with some of the geniuses of human history like Galileo. But the truth cannot be stifled too long. The Church may have power to force upon people its own fears and feeling of insecurity under the guise of truth, but cannot conquer their minds. It is said of Galileo that during his inquisitional procedure he admitted out of fear for his life, that the sun was going round the earth. But as he came down from the podium after the ordeal, he is supposed to have said sotto voce "and yet the earth goes round the sun".

After over three hundred years, the Vatican Commission appointed to re-examine the case of Galileo has come out now, with a statement acquitting the scientist of the heresies of which he was accused. For most people in the world, it is certainly not sensational news. They can only exclaim: Oh! how long it has taken the Church to realize a truth which the world had realized centuries ago. If only there had been a fair examination of the case of Galileo, much suffering and tortures could have been spared, and the great antagonism to the Church in the scientific world, with consequences for its mission and witness, could have been averted.

We can only wish that the Church had learnt enough lessons from the past. Any one who fails to learn from history is bound to repeat it. Because God writes straight on crooked lines, the Church cannot keep on writing on crooked lines. Openness to truth on the part of the Church is today much more needed than ever before, given the wide variety of pluralism in every sector of human life - political, economic, religious, cultural etc. Streamlining these thousand facets of truth into one mould and controlling them would be greatly detrimental to the disciples of Jesus and to the truth of Jesus. The Church cannot simply pose as *the* embodiment of truth.

Untruth to avoid scandal?

Just as servility passes for obedience and cowardice for prudence, so the fear of scandal leads people in the Church conveniently to stifle the truth. We are reminded of the words of Pope Gregory the Great, who said "But if scandal is taken at the truth, it is better to allow scandal to arise than to neglect the truth". Was not Jesus the truth, considered a glutton and a drunkard for having been found in meal-fellowship with the poor and the outcasts, and contrasted with the more 'edifying' ascetic figure of John the Baptist?

One of the standard arguments which is an excuse or coverup is that we should not scandalize the public by exposing the untruths in the life of the Church. The real reason, perhaps, is that we should not appear weak, limited, liable to make mistakes. But do we not honour truth when we are ready to admit our limitations and weaknesses in the Church as a witness to that truth and grace of God by which we are guided. Did not the humble acknowledgement of mistakes, of limitations by Paul, Augustine and Gandhi add to their stature?

But even with all its preoccupations to conceal truth for fear of scandal, has the Church really succeeded in avoiding scandal? Are not the palaces built for the clergy and the religious and the enormous Churches constructed apparently to honour the carpenter's son of Nazareth, standing monuments of scandal in a country where people are in the grip of brutalizing and oppressive poverty?

A few weeks ago I was in one of the villages in Tamilnadu and with the help of the parish priest who was a very open type of person, had discussions with various sections of the people - headmen of the village, housewives, youth, teachers. Talking about the problems of the village, they frankly admitted that they were discriminating against a group of Harijans living at the outskirts of their village, that there was much inequality and

injustice in the sense that the agricultural lands were owned by the caste people of the village, whereas the Harijans were poorly paid daily labourers working for them. It was good to see the people themselves evaluating their conduct, admitting the many truths and untruths in their daily lives, sharing their hopes and anxieties, exposing problems and exploring new ways of action to overcome them.

In the same village, I had also a session with the religious sisters, most of whom were engaged in teaching in the village school. I was struck by the fact that for these sisters there existed no problems either in the village or in the school, and if any was pointed out, they had ready explanations or stock answers to give. The Reverend Mother, an overbearing woman, who was also the headmistress of the school and who also did most of the talking, leaving the other sisters to admire her eloquence and nod their approval, narrated an incident.

She said that in a little town where she was working earlier, she saw three priests who had come as visitors to a religious house of men, jump over the gate at night to go for a movie to a neighbouring theatre. The next day, she said, when the people around the place told her that they saw a few priests getting over the gate to go apparently for a film, she showed herself incredulous and told the people that they were surely mistaken. Now she was narrating this incident with a sense of pride. Her point was that though she knew that they were priests, she did not betray them. The incident made me reflect a lot about truth and untruth in the Church and raise a lot of questions.

In the Church, priests and religious form a class apart, and it would appear that lies could be told to 'save' these men and women of the establishment and to safeguard their interests and avoid scandal. Accounts can be doctored in the institutions, workers can be illtreated or underpaid, teachers could be kept as permanently

temporary hands; and these things should not be exposed. There is a class interest to be defended and this passes for defence of the Church and its truths. The clergy and the religious are so much identified with the Church that any exposition of unpleasant truths becomes automatically an attack on the Church itself.

I should like to reflect further on this incident which is illustrative of an attitude in the Church: there not a whole web of untruths in the incident? First of all, why should these priests jump over the gate? The reason perhaps is that a priest is not supposed to see movies even in this age of art and communication. After all the glorious things said by the Church in recent years about the media of social communications, still, in the eyes of many superiors and the general public a movie is taboo for priests and sisters. Therefore, the priests had to find ways and means to do it stealthily so as not to incur the displeasure of the authorities and not to scandalize the public. Supposing it was an obscene film, is it not a clear sign that the priests concerned live a double truth, one about chastity to be preached to the people and another for their own lives?

Inconsistencies and manipulations

The truths loudly proclaimed by the Church unfortunately do not correspond to what it practises - nay, often they are contradictory in action. The Church could declare on the one hand, '*Ecclesia abhorret a sanguine*' - Church abhors bloodshed - and, on the other hand, act in collusion with civil powers to inflict torture and death penalty on innumerable persons. Official statements are released in defence of human rights and justice, and yet the Church could be a supporter of totalitarian and dictatorial regimes which deny human rights to their citizens and quell dissenting voices. The Church is very particular to affirm the autonomy of political and religious spheres and proscribe the involvement of clerics and religious in politics. And yet, we know that the history of Christianity

from the Constantine era upto recent times, presents a very different picture. Even today, one wonders how people at the higher echelons in the Church could get involved in political issues and pursue diplomatic means while the same thing should be prohibited to people who are committed at the grass-root levels to the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, as an essential part of their Christian responsibility.

Closely related to the inconsistency of action with the words proclaimed is the tendentious interpretation of the Gospel to suit the interests of the Church-institution. Truth is manipulated when one presents what is secondary as the most important and gives marginal treatment to or neglects altogether the central truths of the Gospel. It is striking, that the texts giving the disciples power to forgive sins or the texts relating to the founding of the Church on Peter, should have been highlighted and given a prominence out of proportion in Christian preaching, whereas the texts in which Jesus declares the poor blessed, pronounces woes on the rich, announces his programme of liberation (Lk. 4:16-21) and insists on service and love, should be downplayed. The reason is because the former passages support clerical authority, the strength of the Church and its structures - in short the interests of the institution.

There can be manipulation not only in the choice of Biblical texts but also in their interpretation. A clear example of how the interpretation of the truth of the Gospel is conditioned by the interests of the Church is the missionary command (Mt. 28:19-20). The injunction of Jesus to the disciples to transmit in a living way the Gospel as something they have personally experienced, became in the era of colonial expansion a command to conquer and to subdue the nations.

The Jews and the Moslems who were baptized under duress continued to practise their original religion in secret. They were called *marranos* and *moriscos*. This

exercise of pressure to make them and, later, the peoples of Asia and Africa Christians was justified through a distorted interpretation of a Gospel parable in which the host asks the stewards to urge the invitees to enter - *compelle intrare* (Lk. 14:23). People in Asia know that it is part of courtesy that they should not immediately accept invitations to eat. Only after the host insists and urges them a second or third time they should sit down to eat.

We need in the Church a kind of psychoanalysis to detect the motives and interests which lie in the unconscious that conditions the presentation of the Gospel truths, in the selection of texts and in their interpretation.

Truth a hand-maid of authority?

The greatest danger the Church faces even today is its tendency to subordinate the truth of Jesus Christ to its own authority, instead of making authority subservient to the truth of Jesus. When authority takes over the Word of God and controls it, when authority claims to be able to teach without humbly learning from the Gospel, the inevitable result is the victimization of prophets who will never cease to exist.

The truth can be lived and experienced in an infinite variety of ways - in love and interpersonal relations, suffering and conflicts, misery and oppression. When the Church is not open to the reality of the people and not sensitive to the manifestations of truth in the world of women and men but confines itself to parroting truth-propositions, with authority as its guardian, it ceases to grow in the truth of Jesus. When the Church does not want to face the reality and yet wants to be the controller of truth, the result is manipulation of truth. There will hardly be any room for transparency and frankness in its dealings; many things would be shrouded in secrecy, concealed in an ambiguous ecclesiastical language. Further, anyone who attempts to explode these things in the name of authenticity will incur heavy penalty. All this inspite of

the teachings of Vatican II which stated in *Gaudium et Spes*:

"...Let it be recognized that all the faithful, clerical and lay, possess a *lawful freedom to express their minds humbly and courageously* about those matters in which they enjoy competence (No.62).

It is said that when Pope Pius IX was asked what was tradition, his answer was simple: *Io sono la tradizione* (I am the tradition). Are there not in the Church many ecclesiastics, bishops, priests, religious superiors, who would go even further and pose themselves as *the* truth? 'I am the truth' is what is being said in many ways in their relation to the people and their subjects, in their attitudes and administrative decisions. At the time of writing this article Karl Rahner, a great theologian, who spoke out fearlessly on many issues in the Church, just died. I cannot but recall a letter which he wrote along with fifteen other Jesuits to John Paul II in 1982 when the Pope intervened in the affairs of the Society of Jesus:

"Holy Father, it goes without saying that we respect your search for the will of God: this is in fact our own daily task. However, even after prayer and meditation we do not find it easy to discern 'the finger of God' in this administrative decision inasmuch as our faith and the experience of history teach us that not even the highest authority is always exempt from error." (Tablet Feb. 27, 1982pp. 209-210)

Yes, in the Church neither the pope, bishops, fathers or mothers general (I do not quite understand why this term "general" which is suggestive of the military system should be retained in the Church), provincials or local superiors can claim to be *the* truth, no matter how wise, learned and experienced they might be. There is only one in the Church who is the truth, Jesus who is also the way to the Father and to the people.

It is the authoritarian practice and the subjection of truth by authority which create an atmosphere of untruth and breeds hypocrisy and opportunism. Theologians who are to help the community to discern the truth of Jesus are led easily to compromise it so as not to fall in disfavour with the authorities. It is the same authoritarian system which makes it possible for an individual, while holding on to the feet of his superior in servility, to have his own foot crush the head of his subordinate. The whole ecclesiastical structure is such that the individuals in position of authority can strangulate truth and yet present as justification whitewashed lies which one should accept unquestioningly. What is most pitiable is that all this should be done with the best of intentions to safeguard what they claim to be 'the good of the Church'.

It is the same tendency of authority to have everything under check and control, which makes it intolerant of any uncertainties about truth. There are people in the Church who are so much obsessed with possessing the truth with all certainty that they would like to have every day, at their breakfast table, a papal bulletin of infallible statements of the day. Often, it is the same kind of people who muzzle the Holy Spirit when he attempts to speak some unpleasant truths through their brothers and sisters in the every day life of the Church. The desire to conquer truth with ease and to possess and control it, only insults it profoundly. The path of truth cannot be less arduous and risky for the Church than it was for its Master.

From the truths of the institution to Jesus the truth

From what has been said it may be clear how in history and in contemporary times as well, the Church tends to stake a totalitarian claim on truth, to be intolerant, to victimise those who do not conform to its system, to be inconsistent and to manipulate the interpretation of the Gospel. One would like immediately to reach the conclusion that the Church should therefore make an avowal of

all these and should desist in future from every semblance of untruth in her life and activities. This is precisely what I do not want to conclude.

The point which I want to underline is that the *Church is bound to act also in future only on the same pattern*. For the very fact that the Church functions as a rigid system, or institution, it is also bound to follow the inner logic of any system or institution which has its own interests to further and defend. In this process, many truths may fall by the wayside because they either do not fall within the horizon of the institution's interests or they are dangerous to it. The conclusion we intend to draw is this: To be truly a pillar of truth, the Church has to change from being an institution to a living community of the disciples of Jesus. It has to return to the truth of Jesus and his Gospel. For such a body of the disciples the question is not whether it possesses the truth but whether it is possessed by Jesus, the truth.

Truth as the inner strength of the community

When the author of the letter to Timothy wrote that the Church is a 'pillar of truth' (I Tim. 3:15) he could not certainly have meant the imperial Church under Constantine or the Christendom of the Middle Ages under a strong papal monarchy or an over-institutionalized Church of the modern times. What he meant was, the concrete community of the disciples of Jesus as he knew it in those days - a Church which did not have either great political strength nor spheres of social influence nor great wealth nor centralized authority. It is this faith-community which he calls a pillar of truth, because its strength lies in Jesus, the truth. Therefore, the element of strength, stability and solidity suggested by the image of the pillar does not apply to any exterior elements but to the inner strength and the living force of the Church - Jesus, the truth.

To be committed to such an understanding of Church as a pillar of truth, is particularly important in the situation

of developing countries like India. For there is the danger that more and more of the model and spirit of a Church understood as organization or institution with all its attitudes to truth as we find them in the history of Christianity in the West, may be transferred to these countries along with capital and technology.

To be a Christian community is not just a matter of organization. In fact, baptism itself is not a sign of becoming a member of an organization as one becomes a member in a club, but a question of being associated with the spirit of Jesus, a sign of commitment to the path of life, enlightened by his truth. Rightly then, it has been called a sacrament of illumination, *photismos*. The Church is a community of the disciples of Jesus which follows the truth of his word as its norm and the guidance of his Spirit as its life-force. Therefore, this community has to learn to cross over from rigid structures, laws, institutions and routine to the realm of refreshing spirit and truth. It is in spirit and truth that Jesus invites his disciples to adore his Father in heaven and it is in his spirit and with the revolutionary power of his word that he wants them to approach the problems of the earth where immense masses lie like the dry bones in the valley of Ezekiel (cf. Ez. 37:1-14).

Understanding the truth of Jesus is not primarily a matter of learned exegesis, of applying form-criticism and redaction-criticism as done by the scriptural anatomists, the exegetes. The real and dynamic instrument for interpreting the truth of the Gospel is *the believers' community* living in inter-action with the society around it. This community cannot afford to be simply a teacher who through its 'magisterium' would pronounce statements but a community which *lives in truthfulness*.

It being so, every local Church has to develop its own specific approach to the understanding and "living" of Jesus the truth, in the particular environment. What makes a local Church, is not the mere reproduction of a

standard administrative system and the setting up of an organizational structure in a particular territory with some adaptations in the way of worship etc. to local conditions. The identity of a local Church should derive rather from the particular relation of the Christian community to the truth of the Gospel - in understanding, interpreting, interiorizing and living it. The way in which a local community comes to the progressive realization of the truth of Jesus would mark its characteristics. Every local Church should have its own particular *sādhana* of the Gospel truth.

Sometime back, I was coming down from Shillong to Gauhati in a jeep with a missionary who was at the steering wheel. He had been working in India even before I was born and I could only envy his health and youthful energy, which the years seem to have worn out but little. We entered into a theological discussion, and he was so passionately involved in it that I had to remind him from time to time that we had proposed to ourselves to reach the plains alive! He expressed his frustration about the situation of confusion in faith caused by theologians in India and the consequent setback missionary work has suffered. The only way to guard the truths of our faith, he maintained, was to go back to the scholastic system which gives clear and correct statements of faith without ambiguities. I was trying to imagine how the Church in the tribal areas could become truly a local Church and understand the truth of Jesus through the scholastic system.

The truth of our faith does not consist primarily in the correctness of the propositions but in the adherence and commitment to Jesus, whose truth cannot be exhausted by systems. What is going to save man and human community is not the belief or profession of a series of propositions and formulas but commitment to truth and growth in it. One can affirm 'true' statements and yet be in the realm of darkness if one refuses to be drawn by the power of the truth. On the other hand, one can believe in propositions imprecise, exaggerated, mutilated and

inadequate and yet be under the grip of truth, though ideally we would opt for both commitment and correctness. More important than what the Church manages to affirm through statements is, that it be committed to Jesus, the Truth, that its concerns are in the directions where Jesus' eyes were turned — to the Father in heaven and to the poor on earth, so that it may be able to see the reality with the eyes of Jesus and understand it with his heart.

In the Western understanding of theology as a logical construct of formulas and propositions arranged in a well knit system, there is place only for an *aut...aut* - either this or that. This can be interpreted as clarity. But clarity is not a sure sign that one is closer to truth. But when we contemplate the truth in its endless variety of colours and forms, as in a kaleidoscope we can only speak inclusively: this *and* that. The deeper the perception of truth, the greater will be our sensitivity to all the fragments of truth that are not yet perceived by us. This will lead to the conviction that anything that contains a ray of light should not be lost. All the fragments of truth should be collected, lest they perish.

Truth in freedom

The Church has to remain at all times and in all circumstances in the Word of Christ. For, it is the fidelity to his word which opens up new vistas of truth. According to the Bible, truth (*emet*) is mainly a matter of fidelity. It means the fidelity of God to what he himself has spoken or speaks. The more faithfully the Church follows the path of truth, the freer it will be. "The truth will make you free" (Jn. 8:32).

The freedom of the Church is not to be understood in a narrow sense of the free exercise of its functions in a country or nation. Just as there can be a deeper and inner freedom in the individual - which is more important, for it is an essential and indomitable force, so too an authentic Church-community needs the freedom which

comes from the love of truth. *Maitri Upanishad* has the following beautiful thought: "When the mind has been immolated in its own source for love of truth, then the false controls of actions done when it was deluded by sensibilia (sense-realities) likewise pass away."

To attain inner freedom through love of truth the Church has to liberate itself from the bondages of power, money and triumphal ostentations. The love for truth should liberate the Church from many a vestige of the colonial era, its pomp and pageantry; it should liberate the Church from the spirit of feudal servitude which is often taken for obedience, from the spirit of conformism which is considered as orthodoxy and the spirit of opportunism and fear which is acclaimed as prudence. But how sad that the Church is all the time preoccupied with its exterior freedom of propagating religion, converting and baptizing people, appointing church-leaders without the interference of governments, and how little concerned it appears to be to attain that inner freedom which only truth can give.

Where there is inner freedom there will be no fear of truth. There will be room for expressing opinions frankly. Truth can grow, flourish and flower only in an atmosphere of freedom. Sometimes we hear about anonymous letters written to bishops, priests and religious superiors. We should admit that this practice is something reprehensible. On the other hand we should also ask whether this is not symptomatic of a situation of unfreedom. If there is genuine freedom of expression and no fear of sanctions and reprisals why should anyone take resort to anonymity?

Interior freedom also gives the courage to speak out the truth without being afraid of consequences. The confrontation of Peter by Paul in Antioch is highly illustrative of the courage that is needed to make the 'truth of the Gospel' shine forth against all types of hypocrisy and insincerity, inconsistency and opportunism. In the narra-

tion of this incident in the Letter to the Galatians (2:11-15) we find expressions like 'acting insincerely' - (referring to the conduct of Peter and the Judaizers) 'not being straightforward about the truth of the Gospel'. Incidentally, it is Paul who in the same chapter referred to Peter as one who was reputed as *pillar* (Gal. 2:9).

There is one particular interpretation of the above incident according to which Paul did not really confront Peter. The tacit assumption is that Peter being the head of the Church and having supreme authority over the Church could not be questioned by Paul. Peter and Paul were in fact play-acting and the whole episode is only a catechetical device to instruct the Christians that the gentiles were not to be forced to follow the ways of the Jews. Is not this interpretation another example of what we said earlier, namely, how biblical texts are forced to suit preconceived ideas?

A community under the spell of truth

To remain as the body of Jesus' disciples, the Church-community besides attaining inner freedom and courage, needs to be constantly under the spell of truth.

There is an incident in the Gospel of John which illustrates this point. The officers who were sent by the chief priests and pharisees to arrest Jesus return without him. When questioned by the authorities, their answer was "No man ever spoke like this man" (Jn. 7:46). They did not arrest Jesus but were arrested by his words. The officers certainly did not lack the power to take Jesus in chains and thus accomplish the mission for which they were sent. When they returned without arresting him, they were aware that this would cost them dear - may be their promotion would be affected, may be they would be suspended or even dismissed. But they were men who did not possess the truth but were possessed by the fascination of truth and surrendered themselves to it. The truth of Jesus' words was such, that they could not simply

resist it. We are at a loss, as to whether we should admire more Jesus whose words were so touching as to disarm the officers or the courage of the officers, their truthfulness and candour.

The Church-community should create an environment where the words of Jesus echo so that all those who are armed with untruth, deceit and manipulation may drop their resistance in an attitude of surrender and worship. The moment the Church is up in arms to defend orthodoxy, propositions etc. it could be that it is trying to defend the truth of its own system. Jesus, the truth does not need defenders. Let us remember the episode in the Gospel where Jesus tells his over enthusiastic disciple Simon Peter who cut off the ear of Malchus to defend him: "put your sword into its sheath" (Jn. 18:11). May be that Jesus is telling the Church today to put every sword of untruth, censure and control in the sheath.

Truth as orthopraxis

According to John it is by doing what is true that one comes to the light or the knowledge of truth (Jn. 3:21). This means that there can be no orthodoxy without orthopraxis. The touchstone of the truth of what is stated is the praxis. It is in seeking to do what is truth that the Church-community can enter into a deeper understanding of truth.

Gandhi believed in the truths of the sacred books of Gita and the Gospels, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. But what made Gandhi what he was, was not his intellectual adherence to these truths which he had in common with millions of religious men, but the fact that these truths were for him realities to be experimented in his own life. "My experiments with truth" is the title of his narration of the story of his life which contains experiments with the renunciation of the fruits of action without at the same time renouncing action and commitment. The

experiments with the truth included *Brahamacharya*, *Satyagraha* and love of one's enemies as a way of life. The truth of the Scriptures which sounded like high ideals became slowly the truth of his own life.

How does this compare with the Church? The Church is not the institution whose members believe and profess all that Jesus taught, as contained in the New Testament. It is the community of those who try to embody those truths in life. Ultimately, what makes the Church is orthopraxis. It is not a group of people who can proclaim that they are Christians because they believe in what Jesus said but a group of apprentices attempting and experimenting with truth in the school of Jesus and thus becoming more and more Christian day by day. The Church, then, is a sustained endeavour to become Christian, following the path of truth and upheld in its efforts by the very force of truth itself or the grace of the Spirit.

The truth which the Church has to seek relentlessly can often take her through dangerous paths of conflicts and struggles. A Church which functions mainly as an institution, with the presupposition that truth is fenced within its walls will have also the facile deception of possessing peace and order, while the world of the poor around is on fire. It is only a Church-community which seeks truth by going through struggles will also encounter the truth of the poor, the suffering and the oppressed. It is only when the Church tears up its institutional interests and attitudes and becomes a flexible, creative, people-oriented community, will it be able to identify the body of Jesus, the truth in the naked, the hungry and the thirsty.

If the poor and the oppressed are the body of Jesus the truth, it is today this truth that the Church is called upon to defend against all forces of oppression, lie and deceit. How much of holy zeal has been manifested in defending the truth-propositions and how much time

and energy have been spent for that! Today, what we need is not so much the defence of truth formulas, but the defence of the poor with whom Jesus identified himself. The defence of the truth of the poor and the oppressed will take the Church necessarily through the paths of conflicts and struggles. For defending the truth of the poor, the Church may be stoned, rejected and crucified. Truth has to pass through the mystery of death, to shine forth with the radiant light of the resurrection.

We are happy that in various parts of the world the Spirit is leading many groups of the disciples of Jesus - Christian communities to truth. The Spirit is spurring them on to find Jesus the truth, the meaning of the mystery of his death and resurrection in the concrete commitment for the liberation of the oppressed. It is heartening to see, for example, how the Church in the Tamil regions of Sri Lanka - Jaffna and Batticola far from distancing itself from the struggles of the people is one with them in the forefront. It suffers with the people bearing their wounds and death upon its heart. Fr. Singarayar and Fr. Sinnarasa who have served prison sentences fighting with death and many others like Fr. Joseph May who are in the list of the wanted, are symbols of a Church which is alive and is concerned to defend the truth of a suffering people. For this Church, truth is not something to be accepted as correct but a question of life and its realities.

Truth - an endless common search

Let me conclude these reflections with a word on the quest for truth. It is in the act of searching and according to the intensity of involvement in it that truth begins to manifest itself. Dialogue in this context assumes great importance for the disciples of Jesus, not so much as a means leading to common agreement and formulations but as an indispensable means of constantly remaining in truth.

This dialogue is to be pursued not only with other religions and the truths found in their traditions but with every other ideology that seeks to enlighten the mystery of man and the situation of humanity. The Church-community has to understand itself more and more as a pilgrim, as a Church in voyage.

The bark of Peter is, after all, not meant to be anchored near the shore for fear of facing furious winds, and imperious waves in the deep sea of truth. However sheltered the port of systems, bureaucracies, organizations and doctrines, however calm the waters of routine, the Church has to set sail on the unbounded ocean with the assurance that it is not travelling alone but is moving in the company of many more barks, that when one is in danger of sinking there are others to save it and that the sea is not to exclusive possession of any of them.

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Jesus the Truth

The concept of 'Truth' is of primary importance in the Gospel of John where there is an identification between the 'Truth' and Christ himself. Jesus tells his disciples: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). To the Jews who believed in Jesus, he says: "The truth will make you free.....if the son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn 8:31-36). Hence it is worth examining what exactly the word 'truth' means.

The notion of 'truth' has been always a notion of great importance in all the philosophical systems of all ages and of all cultures. And it is also true about the great religious systems of thought and specially about the biblical tradition. In the Biblical tradition itself the notion of truth gains a fundamental importance in the vocabulary and theology of John.

Leading ideas

As every author of the New Testament, John has also his leading ideas. If for Paul the leading idea is that of the redemption accomplished by Christ, for John it is the idea of revelation: God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, in order to communicate to us the divine life¹. This idea is expressed in the Prologue: "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14): "the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known" (Jn 1:18). Hence the mystery of Incarnation determines the whole thinking of John².

1. cf. C. H. Dodd, "The Background of the Fourth Gospel", *S/SyL* 19 (1935), 343.

2. cf. D. Molit, *L'Évangile selon saint Jean*, Paris, 1973, 16

However, the terms 'revelation' or 'reveal' are not at all used in the Gospel and in the Epistles of John³. John uses with a certain insistence the term 'manifest'. But above all it must be noted that all the great theological notions of John are related to the idea of revelation such as: Word, speak, proclaim, light, glory, name, sign, life etc. In the vocabulary of the fourth Gospel and the Epistles of John it seems that the term 'truth' expresses more fully this fundamental theme of John. Therefore it is of utmost importance to know the precise meaning of 'truth' in St John.

Different interpretations

There are some who interpret the 'truth' in a metaphysical sense, namely, as referring to the essence or being of God⁴. There are others who interpret it in a subjective sense, referring to the fidelity of God, corresponding to the Hebrew *Emeth* of the Old Testament⁵. Some hold that John is influenced by the Greek philosophical thinking and, therefore, Truth in the fourth Gospel means eternal reality as revealed to men, either the reality itself or the revelation of it⁶.

In order to understand properly the johannine notion of 'Truth' we have to examine the usage of the term in the Gospel itself with its literary and theological context. The following is an attempt in this direction.

The johannine vocabulary

The johannine vocabulary in this respect is quite different from the Greek or hellenistic usage. John never

3. There is only one exception and that is Jn 12:38 which is quoting from Isaiah 53:1

4. cf. Chr. E. Luthardt, *Das johannische Evangelium I*, Nurnberg, 1875, 75.

5. cf. Th. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Johannes ausgelegt*, Leipzig, 1921, 84.

6. cf. C.H.Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1930, 177; R.Baltmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, Göttingen, 1962, 50.

identifies 'truth' with 'being' or 'substance' or the 'divine'. Unlike the Greeks John never speaks of contemplating the truth. There is only one phrase 'to speak the truth' which is found in all the traditions. It is quite normal that such a common phrase appears in all traditions and therefore we cannot take this phrase alone to interpret it in the hellenistic or gnostic sense.

At the same time there is a series of expressions in John which are expressions found in the biblical and jewish traditions. The parallelism between the Law and the Truth (Jn 1:17), the association between Holiness and Truth (Jn 17:17-19), the contrast between truth and falsehood can be found in the biblical and jewish traditions. Different phrases such as 'the spirit of the truth' (Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Jn 4:6), 'to do the truth' (Jn 3:21; 1 Jn 1:6) 'to know the truth' (Jn 8:32; 2 Jn 1) have got their parallel counterparts in the jewish tradition. The different phrases combined with the expression 'in the truth' such as, 'walk in the truth', 'love in the truth', 'worship in the truth', 'to be sanctified in the truth' etc. are of exclusively semitic origin.

Apart from all these, there is a third category of expressions which are specifically johannine for which we do not find real parallels. These are expressions such as: "to bear witness to the truth" (Jn 5:33; 18:37), "I am the Truth" (Jn 14:6), "to be of the truth" (Jn 18:37; 1 Jn 2:21; 3:19), "the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32), "the truth remains in you" (2 Jn 2), "become collaborators of the truth" (3 Jn 8). Many of these phrases seem to have some sort of preparation in the jewish tradition, though some phrases like "to be of the truth" and "the truth remains in you" seem to be absolutely original⁷.

From the above observations we can conclude that the johannine vocabulary regarding the 'truth' does not go back to the hellenistic or gnostic tradition, but rather

7. cf. I. de la Potterie, *La verite dans saint Jean 11*, Rome, 1977, 1005-1007.

to the biblical and palestinian jewish tradition. However in making use of this vocabulary John has shown to be quite personal and original in his presentation.

The Way, the Truth and the Life

We concentrate our study on Jn 14:6 where Jesus declares "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". Of all the johannine phrases where the term 'truth' occurs, this is the most typical and profound statement of Jesus.

The statement of Jesus presents the three terms as parallels. Hence, first of all, we have to examine the relationship of these three nouns to one another. There are two categories of explanations in this regard: One, explanations wherein the 'way' is directed toward a goal that is the truth and / or the life; and the other, explanations wherein 'the way' is the primary predicate, and the truth and the life are just explanations of the way⁸.

Jesus the Way to Truth and / or Life

Most of the Greek Fathers understood the way and the truth to lead to the life, eternal life, in heaven while most of the Latin Fathers understood that the way leads to both the truth and the life. Thomas Aquinas held that Christ was the way according to his humanity, but the truth and the life according to his divinity. There are modern scholars who interpret John against the background of Gnostic dualism, Mandeian or Hermetic thought. According to them this statement refers to the ascent of the soul along the way to the heavenly sphere of truth, light and

Jesus the way being the truth and the life

According to other modern scholars Jesus is the way because he is the truth and the life. That the way is the dominating phrase in v. 6 is suggested by the fact

8. For a detailed presentation of explanations in this regard, cf. I. de la Potterie, *La verite dans saint Jean I*, Rome 1977.242-249

that Jesus is reaffirming his statement about the way in v.4, in response to Thomas's question about the way in v.5. Moreover the second line of v.6 leaves aside the truth and the life and concentrates on Jesus as the way: "No one comes to the Father except through me". This second view seems to be the best. If the three phrases, 'the way', 'the truth' and 'the life' are joined by "and", the 'and' between the first and the second may be exegetical or explanatory (= that is to say)⁹.

The background: biblical and jewish

To understand the meaning of this statement, we have to examine the literary background. The Old Testament speaks often about the way of the truth (Gen 24:48). Usually this expression signifies the manner of living in conformity to the Law, namely the right way of living according to God's will¹⁰. The parallel phrase 'the way of life' (Ps 16:11; Prov 5:5-6) indicates a manner of life which assures a long and prosperous existence¹¹. The terms 'way' and 'truth' are often used as synonyms: "Teach me the way, O Lord, that I may walk in thy truth" (Ps 86:11).

However, these texts are still quite different from Jn 14:6, because 'truth' in these texts is taken above all in a moral sense of rectitude. But it is significant that in many of those texts there is a sort of eschatological perspective: "the wise man's path leads upward to life, that he may avoid Sheol beneath" (Prov. 15:24).

In the N. T. times the eschatological character becomes more explicit. It is remarkable that the only passage where the expression 'the way of truth' occurs in the NT belongs to an eschatological context: "And many

9. cf. F.Blass and A.Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other early Christian Literature*, Chicago 1961, 442

10. cf. W.Michaelis, art on 'Way' in *TWNT*, V,14:27.

11. cf. B.Couroyer, "Le Chemin de la vie en Egypte et en Israe!", *RB* 56 (1949), 429

will follow their licentiousness, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled" (2 Pet 2:2). It refers to the way of life in conformity to the faith. Later, it is called 'the right way' (2 Pet 2:15) or 'the way of justice' (2 Pet 2:21), and is opposed to the way of Balaam, the false teachers (2 Pet 2:15).

In the early christian tradition, the truth is explicitly associated with the person of Christ. In the Odes of Solomon we read: "His Word is with us for all our way the saviour who saves our souls" (41, 11-12). The same association between Christ and the truth is found in the Acts of Thomas where Christ is often presented as the revealer of the truth¹².

The literary analysis

In the section Jn 14:2-11, the v.6 forms a sort of link between what precedes (vv. 2-5) and what follows (vv. 6-11). In v.6 one passes from the future tense to the present tense¹³. Till v.5 attention is centered on the future Jesus who is going to depart and prepare a place for the disciples in the Father's house. If we interpret v.6 in the light of this first half of the passage, the words of Jesus, "I am the way" could be understood in the sense that Jesus has the power to take his own with him into the presence of his Father. Jesus will be then the way in a strictly eschatological sense.

But precisely from v.6 onwards the idea is developed differently. It is no more referring to a future event, but a present situation. In vv.6-11 no verb is used in the future. The v.6 itself is a general declaration, which finds its application from the present moment. The explanation

12. For a detailed study of the biblical and judeo-christian background in this respect, cf. I de la Potterie, *La verité dans saint Jean I*, Rome 1977, 254-283.

13. See the excellent analysis of this passage by W. Michaelis in his article on the Way in TWNT V, 80-85.

that follows the declaration: "No one comes to the Father but by me" indicates that Jesus will lead his own to the Father already at present. Therefore it is in the light of this second half of the passage (vv. 7-11) that we have to interpret v.6. To go to the Father through Jesus (v.6b) is to pass through the way that he is, by receiving from him 'truth' and 'life' (v.6a). By describing himself as the 'truth' and the 'life', Jesus wants to say that he leads us to the Father by revealing the Father to us and by communicating to us the life of the Father.

The truth and the life

What is the relationship between the truth and the life? Are they two parallel and independent explanations of the term way? Or is there any interdependence between them? It seems that they are interdependent. John always refers to the word of Jesus or to the faith in Jesus and in his word (synonym for truth) as the means for life. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life" (Jn 3:36). "He who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life" (Jn 5:24). So it is through the gift of the truth that Jesus gives us the life of the Father. Therefore Jesus is the way to the Father or he leads us to the Father, because he is the truth and thus he makes us participate in the life of the Father. Hence, to go to the Father through Jesus the way means to become partakers in the life of the Father through the truth.

Jesus the truth

What does it mean by this identification between Jesus and truth? Is it to be understood only in a functional sense, namely, that Jesus reveals to us the truth of the Father, or makes known the Father to us? It seems that it tells us something more about the person of Jesus himself. Jesus does not say simply that he teaches or proclaims the truth, but that: "I am the truth". If he was only a teacher or preacher of truth, he could not claim for himself any essential distinction from the prophets or apostles. No

prophet, nor an apostle could say: 'I am the truth'¹⁴. The uniqueness of Jesus is that he identifies himself with the truth. Jesus is not only the revealer of the Father, but he is himself the fulness of this revelation. He is, in his person, the eschatological, total and definitive revelation.

This is already indicated in the Prologue, in which Jesus is said to be the revelation of the Father (Jn 1:18) and 'full of grace and truth' (Jn 1:14). However, there we do not have such a unique expression as in Jn 14:6 the truth being simply identified with Jesus with the revelatory formula 'I am'. All these show that a merely functional interpretation does not do justice to the johannine formula. The 'truth' in this context reveals to us something about the person of Jesus himself. One should know who Jesus is in himself in order to understand his function¹⁵. The verse of Jn 14:6 on Christ the truth tells us not only that Christ is for men the fulness of truth, this function of Christ reveals to us, at least indirectly, what Christ is in his person, what he is in his pre-existence, in his trinitarian relationships between the Son and the Father.

The context

As we have indicated above, the small section Jn 14:2-11 is composed of two parts namely, vv 2-6 and 6-11 in which v.6 forms a sort of link between the two parts. The word 'way' in this verse, as we saw, is the culmination of the first part, and the second part is a resumption and further explanation of the verse 6. Therefore, it is the second part that will help us to understand better in what sense Jesus is the way towards the Father and in what sense he is the truth.

14. cf. St Jerome, In Eph 4.21 in PL 26,507 A

15. cf Y.De Montcheuil, *Leçons sur le Christ*, Paris, 1949,53

The verses 7-11

In this passage we can trace three stages of development:

1. A declaration of Jesus, which is a first explanation of v.6, namely it is through the knowledge of the Son that one arrives at the knowledge of the Father (v.7)
2. A question of Philip shows that he does not understand the declaration of Jesus. He demands to see the Father with the physical eyes (v.8).
3. A new explanation of Jesus explicates his thought: the believer can see the Father in the Son, because the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son. It is through the Son that the Father does his works (vv 9-11).

One can see very well the theme of the passage: The knowledge of the Son leads to the knowledge of the Father because of the inter-communion between the Father and the Son. But in order to know thus the Father through the Son, it is necessary to see Jesus, not only with the physical eyes, but with the eyes of faith, namely to discover in him the Son and in the Son the Father.

This explains better the meaning of v.6 where Jesus declares himself as the way, the truth and the life. Jesus is the truth, because he is in his person the fulness of the revelation. Jesus is the living revelation of the Father. This is possible for him because he is in the Father and the Father is in him (vv. 10a and 11a), for the Father dwells in him (v.10c). He who, seeing Jesus with his physical eyes, contemplates in him the hidden reality of his union with the Father, will see the Father with his eyes of faith (v. 9b). This perfect communion between the Father and the Son is manifested to us in the words of Jesus. These are words of revelation, which Jesus does not speak by himself (v.10b). Through Jesus, it is the Father himself who acts (v. 10c). If such an immediate faith in the communion between the Father and the Son is lacking (v.11a), the disciples should believe at least on account

of the works (v.11b). And since these are works done together by the Father and the Son, such a faith will lead one to the knowledge of the Son and the Father.

Manifestation of communion

The above explanation shows in what sense Jesus speaks of himself as the Truth. He is the Truth, namely the total and definitive revelation, because in his person is rendered present in our midst and is manifested to us the intimate communion between the Son and the Father. Jesus is the Truth; he reveals to us this mystery in his person, precisely because the Father dwells in him. To see and to know the Son is to see and to know the Father. Jesus alone is the Truth, because in him is manifested to us the mystery of his person, his communion of life with the Father, his quality of the Son in relationship to the Father¹⁶.

In the light of Jn 1:14-18

In Jn 1:14-18 as in Jn 14:6-11 the subject is Jesus the Incarnate Word. In both passages the term 'truth' is used to describe the revelatory function of Jesus. The words in 1:18: "he has made him known" are structurally parallel to the words: "full of grace and truth" in 1:14¹⁷. This shows that in John 'Truth' and 'revelation' are equivalent. Now in the two places in the Prologue where the term 'truth' is used, it is associated with the theme of the sonship of Christ: "And the Word became flesh...full of grace and truth...glory as of the only Son from Father" (Jn 1:14). "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only Son..." (Jn 1:17-18). If for John and the other disciples Jesus Christ was the revelation, it is because Jesus manifested himself to them always as being in the bosom of the Father" (Jn 1:18), living in a constant filial relationship of obedience and love with Father. Hence the 'truth' of Jesus, the revelation that Jesus brings is the manifestation of his divine sonship.

Jn 8:31-3

Another passage which associates the terms 'truth' and 'sonship' is Jn 8:31-36, which speaks about the freedom

16. cf. I. de la Potterie, *op.cit*, vol.I, 270

17. cf. I. de la Potterie, *op.cit*, vol.I, 127-128

through the truth. If in v.32 it is the 'truth' that liberates, according to v.36 it is the 'Son' who liberates. As in Jn 1:14-18 and 14:6-11 here also the idea of 'truth' evokes spontaneously for John the idea of the 'Son'. It is in his quality of being the Son that Jesus is the 'truth'.

Jesus, the Word made flesh

In the light of the parallel texts we see that Jesus is the way to the Father, because he brings us to the communion with the Father (cf 1 Jn 1:3) and he enables us to share in the life of the Father. He alone can be this way because he lives by the life of the Father and is at the same time a man like us, which is an essential condition for mediation between God and man. He alone can be this way, because, on the one hand, in God he is the Word with God (Jn 1:1-2), the Life which is with the Father (1 Jn 1:2); on the other hand, here on earth he is the Truth, the revelation of this communion between the Son and the Father, and therefore he is the 'life' for those who are his own.

But it is through the Incarnation that the 'Word' became the 'Truth' because only the incarnated Word, the man Jesus can reveal to us his filial life, his divine life. The truth that Jesus brings is, so to say, embodied in the word made flesh¹⁸.

That is why in answer to the question of Pilate about his kingship Jesus said: "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18:37). The incarnated existence of Jesus itself is the revelation. So, for Christ the act of revealing consists in revealing himself¹⁹. To know the truth is to know and penetrate into the mystery of Jesus, in whom the Son and the Father meet each other.

18. It may be noted that the term 'truth' in John is never applied to God or the Father, and is always applied to the Son or Jesus.

19. cf. S.Lyonnet, *La benediction de Eph 1:13-14 et son arriere plan judaïque*, in *A la rencontre de Dieu*. Memorial A. Gelin Le Puy, 1961, 341-352 (cf.352).

Descending and ascending movements

The three titles of Jesus in Jn 14:6 describe a twofold movement: an ascending and a descending movement. The descending movement is from the Father towards men and it is accomplished in Incarnation through revelation which is for us Christ the "Truth". The ascending movement is from men towards the Father, and it passes through Christ the Way. He alone can be the way to the Father, because he alone is at the same time flesh among men and 'Word of Life' with the Father.

Hence the correct interpretation of the statement that 'Jesus is Truth' requires a sort of constant dialectic between the two aspects of the mystery of Jesus, namely, that of his Incarnation (Jesus Christ who is in the bosom of the Father) and that of his divine life (the Word with God or the Life which was with the Father). Thus we understand why Jesus alone can be called 'the Truth' and why he alone is 'the Way' to the Father. This is similar to the Pauline doctrine about Jesus Christ as the sole mediator between God and man²⁰.

Conclusion

The johannine identification of Jesus with the 'Truth' refers to the immanent and transcendent character of Jesus. If the man Jesus is for us the Truth, the revelation of the intimate life of the divine persons, that is what he was already in himself with God, prior to all revelation and work of salvation, namely the Word of Life which was with the Father. However, for John, only the Jesus of History is the Truth. And he is such because he has always lived in the bosom of the Father as the Son in communion with the Father and thus became for us the revelation of God. Only Jesus Christ, in the total transparency of his life and his words to that of God the Father could say about himself: "I am the Truth".

20. It is worth noting that also in Paul the idea of the unique mediation of Jesus is associated with the notion of truth (cf. 1 Tim 2:3-6).

The Truth that Sets us Free

Truth and lie

In the preface to a collection of his. (Malayalam) poems K. Saccidanandan observes that "we are living at a time when it is becoming more and more painful and difficult to come by the truth and communicate it". That, however, is no reason to give up the search, and to retire. The painful situation should, suggests the poet, goad us the more sharply on to commitment to fresh quest, cultivation and communication of what is true and authentic, beyond superficial revolutions, beyond greed and power-struggles, and beyond the simplistic solutions offered by the sciences, ideologies and religions. Refuse to compromise with the lie of injustice and autocracy and every form of untruth; and press relentlessly on towards the ultimate source of light¹.

Satyāgraha is a must. Our being human, our human being, our existence together in this history demands that, with Gandhiji and the people in the hills and villages, we hold on to reality and let our lives be truth's experiment. Let them be part of the process in which truth shapes up and takes hold of itself. And let our prayer be "From the unreal/untrue lead me to the real/the true"². This demand comes as well from our faith in God whom we refer to as truth's Truth (*satyasya satyam*), as One whose law is Truth (*satyadharmā*) and who is faithful to his promises to his beloved people³. It comes no less from our discipleship of him who saw his life's task as

1. Saccidanandan K., *Kavitha*, Kottayam 1981, p. 5

2. *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad* I. 3.28. The chant is as follows:

asato ma sad gamaya : From the unreal lead me to the real!
tamaso ma jyotir gamaya : From darkness lead me to the light
mṛtyor ma amṛtam gamaya : From death lead me to immortality!

3. *Maitri Upanishad* V. 35: *Bhagavad Gita*, XVIII. 65, *satyam te pratijane, priyo'si me*.

bearing witness to the truth — of the people, of their history, their earth and their God. "For this I was born, for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth", said Jesus of Nazareth (Jn 18:37). "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and truth will make you free" (ib. 8:32).

The Chândogya Upanishad reflects an ancient belief in the liberating power of truth. In an ordeal, the thief, the man of untruth who "makes himself out to be what he is not" (*anṛtam ātmānam kurute*) gets burnt and killed. But the innocent man who "shows himself to be what he really is" and identifies himself with truth (*satyam ātmānam kurute*) is preserved and released⁴. The belief is obviously older than the practice of ordeal by fire.

If truth liberates and saves, untruth enslaves and destroys. The verse from John 8 cited above develops a discussion in which untruth and lie are bound up not only with slavery and sin but with murder and the will to kill and the devil who was a murderer from the start, one in whom there is no truth at all. A related passage in John's first epistle connects truth with love and life, and bands together the devil and death and hatred of one another and Cain who cut his brother's throat (I Jn 3:10-20). The prayer quoted from the Bhādaranyaka Upanishad is followed by a comment in which the *asad* (untruth) and the *tamas* (darkness) are identified as death while the real, the true, the light is immortal life⁵. It is from this perspective on truth as liberating and life-giving and of untruth as characterised by destruction of freedom and of life that we have to probe the nature of the structures which affect and shape us, of our economic system and organisation of social power.

For the system is increasingly showing itself as total threat to life and a nightmare of global destruction. In fact the destruction has already been inaugurated in the

4. Chândogya Upanishad VI. 16.1-3

5. see note 2 above.

incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Dachau, in the holocausts of colonial adventurism and of the two great wars of the century fought among the rich in a scramble for control of world market, raw materials and cheap labour. Death and destruction are already being made operative in the growth of contrived unfreedom, wretchedness and poverty for the Third World countries, victims most of them of the old, no less than of the new, colonialism. The lie is rampant in the massive starvation deaths occurring in North-East Brazil which was yesterday's show-piece of capitalism's development strategy and security state ideology⁶; in the submergence of Brazil and other countries in shoreless indebtedness; in the continual devaluation of the Third World's money, resources, honour and people. The untruth of the system and its anti-life passion bare themselves in the emergence of and in the support given by the First World to apartheid kingdoms, martial law regimes, dictatorships which rule by terrorism, torture and assassination, and every species of oppression and discrimination. The system's hostility to life, truth and freedom is manifest in the open international brigandage practised by nations mighty of muscle, in the harassment of free nations like Nicaragua and Angola and in the systematically planned massive massacres in Central America.

6. *The Statesman*, 24 April 1984, p. 10 has the following report: RIO de Janeiro; 23 April "Ten million people, mostly children, have died from hunger or malnutrition in the past four years in North-East Brazil, which has a population of 36 million, reports APF. Some 71% of children in the seven States of the region suffered from malnutrition, a document of the Brazilian Agricultural Reform Association published here today said....

The misery of the rural population was due specially to inequality in the distribution of land, the Association said. A million farmers did not own their land.

Between 1970 and 1980, land concentration benefitting wealthy landlords had increased, and the number of small holdings diminished, the document added"

The subhuman nature of the system may be seen in our midst in the deepening dependence of the tribes and the masses of the people on the power elite, in the wanton humiliation of the poor, the landless, the untouchables, the tribals, of children and women who are bought and sold, bonded, tortured, exploited, prostituted, raped, used and discarded or burnt. The lie is revealed in mounting militarisation and arms race, in the flourishing industry and commerce in weapons of war, in the nuclear madness, in the proliferation of contrived conflicts, in the death of forests and fishes, the pollution of air and water, the erosion of soil and the advance of the desert and in the upset we have caused of ecological balance. In this ordeal by fire the whole race is proved guilty and is being burned. Have we all become a mass of untruth? A radical conversion to and transformation into truth is called for. Movements are, perhaps, already under way, criticising and questioning the system and searching for alternatives. The Spirit of Truth whom God never ceases releasing into our history is provoking activity for the transformation of structures not only of the mind and the heart but of social existence as a whole down to its material base.

Truth and its way

When the author of the Fourth Gospel confesses Jesus to be the truth, the way and the life, he is giving us a description of Jesus in terms of his mission rather than an ontological definition of his transcendent reality⁷. The mission of Jesus was and is to disclose the truth about God and human beings and the history they are making together. The truth about God in its turn does not refer to the unspeakable mystery of the transcendent depths and heights of the Divine. Nor does the truth about the human purport to convey some philosophical anthropology. The reference rather is to God's attitude to the world, to the forgiving love in which God gathers and holds us, and the trustful life in love to which God invites

7. Brown, Raymond E., *The Gospel According to John*, London 1971, pp. 500, 534, 630

and enables us. This is the truth that really matters, and is vital. It is this that Jesus reveals, bears witness to, and embodies in his life and in all his personal relationships (John 18:37; Rev 1:5; Luke 2:32). Jesus is the truth relationally, functionally, historically.

If that be so, Jesus is truth and becomes truth in the measure in which he lives it; and he lives it to the extent that he discloses and embodies in himself the right God-world relationship as well as the consequent transformation of personal and social existence and its circumstances. If truth sets people free, and if what sets people free is the truth, Jesus becomes it within the progress of a process of liberation which he himself set afoot and continues to provoke and foster. We make the non-historical, non-process confession that 'Jesus is truly God and man'. We celebrate the grace of God in the non-historical non-process proclamation that 'the Word became Flesh'. But it is necessary that as we do so, to firm our feet by giving the doctrine what Nicholas Lash calls "narrative expression in the form of an historical statement, a description of historical process". Lash suggests that "that statement might be: the flesh became Word". Jesus is the product of human history, the fruit of its own resources which are the 'contingent, empirical form' of the resources of grace; in him "the mystery of God and his promise is historically actualized, disclosed, shown, spoken"⁸. But Jesus is also the fruit of his own creative life: living the way he did live, he creatively shaped the truth that he ultimately became.

When Jesus reversed whatever really was, or was considered to be, the result of the rule of demonic forces: when he gathered in the outcasts and associated with the ostracised; when he made publicans and prostitutes welcome and reassured these victims of social contempt; when he restored the small people and the

8. Lash, Nicholas, *A Matter of Hope. A Theologian's Reflections on the Thought of Karl Marx*, London 1981, p. 144

despised women, widows, children and the poor to human dignity and honour; when he insisted on assuming responsibility for hungry people and created situations in which people could learn to enjoy sharing of food and life's resources; when he freed people from fear and diffidence and every alienating spirit, and restored them to selfhood and clarity of mind; when he set aside sacred laws, religious traditions, holy practices and all authorities and claims which enslaved and diminished people; when he defied the powers that be of state and of temple; and when he forgave and loved and released into the lives of the poor a new hope and joy and creative strength: when he did these things he was disclosing the truth of God and of the people, and was becoming that truth in his own life and person. In his passion and death this process of truth-becoming and truth-disclosure reached a high point. The crucified Jesus is the truth of God's forgiving love; of God's solidarity with our sinful and suffering existence; of God's resistance to every power of state or church which oppresses and humiliates people; and of God's affirmation of freedom and of people's right to love and worship in joy without being manipulated by Mammon, Temple, Sword or Experts in God. In the resurrection, finally, the Jesus-Truth becomes the Spirit of freedom and joy and of joyful struggle for dignity, released into the lives of the poor and the powerless. And so

...Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and people (Lk 2:52). Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it is written: He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, (and) to set the downtrodden free (Lk 4:18). Jesus was eating with outcasts and tax-collectors... Why does he eat with such people? He answered: I have come to call not the respectable people but the outcasts (Mk 2:15-17). He said: the Sabbath was made for the good of people, not people for the good of the Sabbath (Mk 2:27). He said: I feel sorry for this people. I do not want

to send them off hungry. They might collapse on the way (Mt 15:32). Give them something to eat yourselves (Mk 6:37). He said: Go, sell everything you have, and give to the poor, and come... And he said: how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom (Mk 10:21-25). How happy the poor! But woe to you that are rich! (Lk 6:20-26) And he began driving out those who were selling and buying there (in the temple); he upset the tables of the money-changers...(Mk 11:15-16). As he came in sight of the city, he shed tears over it (Lk 19:41). Jesus wept (Jn 11:35). When Jesus knew that his hour had come, ... having loved his own to the end, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing (Jn 13:5). He took some bread, broke it and gave it to them. Take it, he said, this is me (Mk 14:22). And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last (Mk 15:37). In his life on earth Jesus made his prayers and requests with loud cries and tears to God, who could save him from death. Because he was humble and devoted, God heard him. Even though he was God's Son he learned to be obedient by means of his sufferings. When he was made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him...(Hebrews 5: 7-9).

In truth's footsteps

This path and this process of Jesus' truth-becoming has some remarkable features and points of special significance which we should pause to take note of. In the first place the Jesus-way of truth passes by deliberate option through the land of the Broken. The major theme of the gospel narrative is Jesus' concern for the poor and the oppressed, his dealings with the hungry and his love and service to the miserable, the lepers, the cripples, the blind, the lame, the outcasts, prostitutes and tax collectors, the persecuted, the downtrodden, the deranged, the least

and the lost, the widows, the rabble, the demoniacs, those who labour and are burdened, the harassed sheep, the sheep without shepherd, the condemned, the bereaved⁹. The marginalized, oppressed and honorless sectors of society, together with God's will to liberate and lift them up are constitutive of the truth of Jesus. It is their cry Jesus hears, their questions he answers; in their midst he moves, and their dignity and freedom he struggles for. The truth of Jesus is not grasped apart from the poor, the lower classes and the wretched of the earth. That there is a powerful Christian tradition which is loath to subscribe to this truth and to acknowledge a Church of the poor is not here overlooked. That tradition has its roots in the Constantinian heritage and the Middle Ages when monasteries, universities and clergydom were preserves of the 'majores', the aristocrats and the feudallords. The 'heavenly walks' were not for the poor, the worker and the serf, though the situation was not left wholly unchallenged by communal movements from below¹⁰. We might here reflect with the Upanishadic sages how 'the face of Truth can be hidden by the golden vessel of the sun' or of wealth, caste, or elitist religion; and pray with them that the golden screen may be set aside so that we may see the Truth in its own light¹¹.

We may note, secondly, that Jesus could not possibly make his journey and be true to his God, to the people and to himself without breaking his ties with the established order of his day, be it religious or secular, social or political. That he broke such ties is evident in his pre-

9. cf. Nolan, Albert, *Jesus Before Christianity*, New York, 1976, p. 21
Croatto, Severino, *Exodus*, New York, 1981, pp. 50-51

10. Santa Ana, Julio de, *Good News to the Poor, The Challenge of the Poor in the History of the Church*, New York, 1979, pp. 81-93

11. *Maitri Upanished*, The Face of Truth (satya) is hidden

By the Golden Vessel (of the Sun).

Reveal it to me, Pushan, (that I may come)

To Vishnu, whose law is Truth (satyadharma) (V. 35.)

see also *Isa Upanishad*, 17-18.

erred association with social outcasts and prostitutes, his fellowship with the disreputable. It is to be seen in his attitude to the Temple, its worship and its priests as well as to the Pharisees and the Scribes and their interpretations, rules and claims. Concerning the sacred and awesome reality of the Temple, the decisive thing Jesus had to say was that it would be destroyed and abolished. His own emphasis lay on the primacy of mercy over every sort of temple sacrifice. He disregarded and swept aside all the food regulations and purity laws and declared all food clean. Week after week he used the Sabbath, by breaking its laws, to underscore the centrality of the human and of people's needs and possibilities. The truth Jesus was bearing witness to and pursuing necessitated a clear break with Mammon and Mammon's minions whom Jesus depicted as camels, whom he urged to sell their possessions and join the people if they wished to become human again, against whom he pronounced some of his woes. Jesus broke no less with structures of power. It is a defiant Jesus we see whenever he is in contact with Herod or Pilate or High Priest (Lk 13:31-33; 23:8-9; Mk 14:60-62; 15:2-5; Jn 18:19-24, 33-37; 19:8-11). He broke with relatives and family ties too of the traditional type. 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?', he asked, and he went on to define relationships in terms of openness and obedience to God's word and will, and of the warmth and care with which we love one another (Mk 3:21, 31-35, cf Jn 7:3-8; 20:17; Lk 11:27-28). And finally he broke with popular expectations and nationalist interpretations of the hope of Israel. He was no son of David, no King Messiah, no dealer in heavenly signs, no general marshalling his armed forces against roman imperialism as if that were the basic lie, and none deeper, to be overthrown in the life of the people.

But, thirdly, Jesus spoke, of course, about the kingship of God, and a reference to his own kingship he declined not entirely. There is apparently a sense in which he would acknowledge that he was king. "My kingdom is not of this world"; that is, of the world which Pilate

knows and where he gladly belongs. There are in fact two kinds of kingship, and in that scene the two came face to face. One is the kingship of those who wield power with basis in wealth and arms; it imposes itself, it rules by force; it is heartless and dehumanising. It thus contradicts the truth of the people, and therefore of God. No wonder Pilate could not grasp Jesus' reference to truth. The other kind of kingship which tallies with truth and chimes with the footsteps of Jesus is one proper to every woman and man who loves, to everyone who has a heart human enough to feel, to suffer with others, to give itself away. Such is people's participation in the royalty of God. It is in solidarity with this that the truth of Jesus is built. The very contrast (in John 18 and Luke 23) between the two types of kingship should warn us against ascribing to Jesus the kind of royalty that can be expressed or symbolized in palaces, crowns, cathedrals, tiaras, gold, power, pomp, splendour, condemnations and conquests. The truth of Jesus' kingship can only be expressed in poverty and services, in the washing of one another's feet, in resistance to injustice, in witnessing to freedom, in love unto death in a struggle for people's liberation. The truth of Jesus' kingship consists in that he broke the son-of-David idol (the emergence of Kings in Israel having been a betrayal of the original project of a free and equal society), and identified himself with the Suffering Servant and the kingliness of the poor, resulting in puzzlement, protest and even revolt among his close associates (Mk 8:31-33; 9:33-37; 10:35-45; 14:10-11).

Fourthly, truth in Jesus had to die and rise. In class societies like ours, of which the real organization and real interests are skewed in favour of a powerful few, the truth of God embodied in the truth of the oppressed people becomes inevitably a sign that is contradicted, a stone rejected, a life tested and tortured, crushed and finally cut off. But the will of Jesus that said No to the lie of the system stood unbroken and alive with flaming affirmation of God's people and God's option for them. The inviolate freedom and love, surrendered in service

and taken up into God, add a new upsurge to the people's movement and give it the firmest hope of final resurrection. But the force of the resurrection is already active in the currents of history, fostering new social awareness and providing fresh revolutionary insight and courage. The resurrection happens in the heart of the cross and the struggle where the New Humanity of freedom and love is revealed. The proclamation that Jesus is risen embodies more than the truth of certain experiences of Jesus' disciples, more than the objective fate of the man they came to love. It involves in particular the self-involvement of those who confess and proclaim the news as well as their hope and trust regarding the future of the earth and of humankind. Such self-involvement and hope include personal commitment to action for the transformation of life and its social conditions. The practice of those who would maintain the status quo and are only cosmetically concerned about the hunger and humiliation of the masses of the people, contradicts "the commitment and the hope" implied in the confession. Then, concludes Nicholas Lash, the profession of faith "lacks truth". That is why it becomes clear that "Christ is risen" is a song more truthfully sung by the victims than by the oppressor¹².

Lastly, the medium Jesus used to communicate deserves consideration. Jesus toured the length and breadth of Galilee, visited every village and town, contacting people, experiencing reality directly and at first hand, rendering services and pressing everyone to personal reflection and decision which might enable them to shake themselves free of oppressive powers, to exercise their freedom in loving one another, and so begin to be authentically human. Everywhere Jesus talked to people, told stories, proposed parables. He spoke with friends, spoke in the confidence of homes, spoke to large crowds and debated with his critics. Direct exchange and oral communication was his method. That was his chosen

12. Lash, N., *op. cit.*, p. 86

medium of sharing live truth. For all that we know, Jesus was no writer. He was not pre-occupied with libraries, written documents and ancient authorities. Only once is he presented as reading out a passage from the Old Testament. The few references he makes to the Old Testament and Hebrew history, if they are really his, need not be seen as citations from written texts; they could as well be instances of utilization of popular religious culture. Far greater use is made by Jesus of nature and daily life; and the people's common experiences and relationships. These provide him with a rich variety of telling, pointed; pungent parables, similes and symbols. Writing is an elitist activity; speaking is the art of the masses. The elite and the literate are few. The truth that liberates is essentially interpersonal, relational and communitarian rather than private and elitist. The weight of what Jesus said came from the fact that his words were born of his flesh, his concrete historical existence and practice. Therefore they were transformative and liberating.

Concrete and historical

Jesus met real women and men. He saw actual suffering and squalor, came across distinct rules and sanctions imposed by specific bureaus of power, and watched the hard-earned cash of the poor being taken away by sword-wielding Romans and long-praying Pharisees. To each reality and situation Jesus responded or reacted in definite, tangible ways. He refused to evade concrete tasks by indulging in generalisations or theorising about the past or living in an imaginative future; which does not sprout from present practice. An example would be what he did and said in the desert when the crowds were hungry and the disciples thought of meeting the situation by sending them away to fend for themselves; or how Jesus answered the rich aristocrat who came to inquire about eternal life; or the way he handled the case of the woman taken in adultery. The Fourth Gospel dramatises the point by presenting Jesus as confronting the Pharisees with concrete signs which they fail to face

with a minimum of honesty and openness. In the stories of the healing of the cripple (Jn 5) and of the blind man (Jn 9) the Jews keep their eyes turned away from facts and their attention glued exclusively to the ideology of an abstract law.

Religious and theological language has shown distinct persistent tendency to speak of truth in abstract and general terms. As Nicholas Lash points out, even the proclamation of God's effective love for creation, which was disclosed in Jesus and which includes the possibility of world transformation and the responsibility to work for it on the part of believers, is often made in "extremely abstract, non-historical" terms. And the picture of the human being who is to be loved and saved is drawn less from the reality of Jesus' action and suffering than from some "theoretical, ahistorical conceptions" of human nature¹³. Concern for orthodoxy and correct doctrine is not without point; granted. The trouble lies in the unspoken presupposition that the doctrinal and the theoretical are wholly independent of social conditions, organisations and interests. Few will disagree with Lash's position that "correctness is not yet truth", and that it is dangerous "to assume that, if a proposition is correct, and if its theoretical truth-conditions are fulfilled, *therefore*, wherever and in whatever circumstances we affirm it, we are speaking the truth, speaking truly"¹⁴. The truthfulness of all faith formulations must be called in question when their relationship to the confessing christian is merely theoretical and verbal; it must be denied when the formulations are contradicted by christian practice. Faith in the resurrection of Jesus is empty of truth in a system and a group which exploits and creates malnutrition and disease, or rules by extortion and terror. Should we not as Christians admit, if we would be honest, that there is more christian truth in the liberation movements of

13. Lash, N., *op. cit.* pp. 189, 260

14. Lash, N., *op. cit.* p. 86

twentieth century Asia and Africa than in the nineteenth century theocracies of Spain, England, Holland or France? and more christian truth in the Dalit and peasant struggles than in the work of the missionaries who dined with British Sergeants or decided that the Gospel of the freedom of the children of God was compatible with programs of imperial conquests and the subjugation of free peoples?

Idealism is a real temptation. When philosophies and religions succumb to it they prefer to speak of "pure truths", and incline to slight the reality of this finite, imperfect, changing world, earthly needs, the body, and economic and political activity. But people who hear the Gospel not as a set of beautiful ideas but as divine summons to conversion, to a different historical project, to a different kind of relationship and organization of life, insist that truth is concrete, historical and practical. To Jose Miranda, "any truth that is not a moral imperative is alienating"; "all allegedly pure truths" estrange and distract us "from our responsibility to transform the world". In fact, 'pure ideas' are falsehoods¹⁵. We have no pure and perfect idea of freedom, or salvation, or justice, love, God or the Kingdom of God. We rather have concrete, imperfect, mixed ideas which we keep gathering from concrete, imperfect, complex experiences of becoming more free, more healthy, more loved and loving, more honoring and honoured. There are no biblical "concepts" of freedom or forgiveness or Reign of God. The Bible rather remembers and narrates concrete historical projects of freedom, equality and community, and their successes and failures. And in the process it summons us to commitment to similar projects in our time and place¹⁶. All speech about God tells us about 'the hopes and dreams' of individuals and groups as they

15. Miranda, Jose P., *Being and the Messiah. The Message of St John* New York, 1977 (Spanish original 1973), pp. 78-79.

Pixley, George V., *God's Kingdom. A Guide for Biblical Study*, New York 1981 (Spanish original 1977) pp. 1-3

16. Pixley, George V., *op. cit.*, pp. 1-3

struggle to overcome life's alienations and create meaning. All talk about revelation is "filtered through human experience which is limited by social realities"¹⁷.

Truth is bound up with life and its messy processes. Economics and politics enter its pursuit. One does not come by it through permutations and combinations of pure concepts. Analysis of the common experience of humanity mediates the quest for truth. Analysis of concrete situations mediates the historical realization of the implications and possibilities of the faith. It is such realizations that 'verify' faith affirmations and give them historical content. Marx was right in his insight that "social existence determines consciousness". There is abundant experience to illustrate and support this view. On the basis of it Lash suggests that "in certain circumstances, social and political change may be a necessary precondition for an adequate understanding of the New Testament"¹⁸. Truth is ruled by real, concrete, historical salvation. The truth of faiths and ideas consist in the contribution they really make to the effort to build a better world. Pixley concludes his study of God's Kingdom with the submission that "only experience will tell if the biblical Kingdom of God can be truly good news for the poor...There seems to be some positive elements here, but only their incarnation in effective strategies of liberation will confirm that this is not a matter of illusions. ...The liberation of the people ... is imposed on us today, and for those who believe in God's Kingdom we have a divine ally in our struggle. History must say whether our faith is well placed"¹⁹.

17. Cone, James, *The Social Context of Theology*, in *Doing Theology Today*, Madras 1976, pp. 19-21

18. Lash, N., *op. cit.* p. 118; id., *Theology on Dover Beach*, London 1979, p. 76

19. Pixley, George V., *op. cit.* pp. 104-105; page 5 has the following: "Jesus' death did not finish his movement. Out of that movement came the Christian church, which is still a factor in our history. However, we do not know whether this continuation was good or bad news for the poor to whom Jesus had announced a coming kingdom of justice and peace".

Truth is concrete and relational. It is the unspeakable quality of a person, a fellowship or a project to which the open-hearted respond in friendly fashion. Does not the unlimited sympathy which Pope John XXIII evoked on all sides have something to do with truth? He won the heart and hearing even of groups which are no friends of church or religion. The secret of his appeal was not any intellectual brilliance. It was what Lukas Vischer calls his "deep and large humanity". That made John a symbol of agreement, peace, dialogue and friendship among people²⁰. Truth, then, is not a matter of reason alone, or intellect or logic. It is a matter of reality and relationships. Pope John's *Pacem in Terris* was hardly more remarkable than earlier papal documents. Yet it met with response never before given to letters from the Vatican. Its truth came with and through the truth of the person of John, and went home to people, was recognized, welcomed and allowed to influence hearts. John knew that truth and love are inseparable, they create each other, the one is the language of the other.

Pope John Paul II asks the clergy to abstain from 'politics' and confine themselves to 'spiritual' ministries. Taken as a universal rule to be rigidly applied in all circumstances the world over, this word lacks content. However, the Pope's own deep and manysided involvement in political matters is what influences and encourages priests to do political work which they have already discerned as called for by the situation and the need of the people.

Truth is not only theory and correctness. Theory and practice must coincide. Truth consists both in the reflection of reality and the exerting of transformative influence on reality. Faith is a principle of action, and is concerned with transformation: of people, of the whole

20. Vischer, Lukas, *The Ecumenical Movement and the Roman Catholic Church*, in Harold E. Fey (ed.), *The Ecumenical Advance. A History of the Ecumenical Movement Vol II*. London 1970 p. 332

web of life, of the totality of history²¹. Could the faith movement then rest satisfied with the production of an occasional saint, or with the redemption of private consciousness? The christian task is the redemption of the world (cf John 3:16-17; 1:29; 4:42; 17:21; 18:37). Where this larger, structural transformation is not attempted, the scope for freedom, love and salvation available to individuals, caught in an oppressive and conflictual situation, is limited and partial, if not illusory²².

The truth of faith consists in committed work to make the Reign of God a reality of history and experience. The prayer, Thy Kingdom come, is an act in which the acceptance of the gift of God's reign becomes a commitment to the project of its historical realization. Our hope for the future cannot be meaningful or true if we only live in it in thought and imagination. Hope gains truthfulness and substance from what we do now. Tomorrow's new world of justice, equality and freedom ('heaven') will not be there if we bake and lay no bricks of freedom, equality and justice today.

Building this different world of justice and dignity, of clean air and water, of human size and pace, of food and honour for all is the task of the peoples of the world, and not of any particular religious minority. It cannot be the exclusive task of the christian minority in the world or in India. In the light of the history of the last five hundred or more years and of the present situation, there is little the world can expect from powerful christian quarters to halt the advance of wars, weapons, hunger, unfreedom and death. But at the heart of the christian movement stands a compelling sign of freedom and hope: Jesus with his struggle unto death for the libe-

21. McElvaney, Willaim K., *Good News is Bad News....* New York 1980, p. 5. Lash, N., *A Matter of Hope*, pp. 78, 84, *Theology on Dover Beach* pp. 52-53 where the author refers to Newman's University Sermons.

22. Lash, N., *A Matter of Hope*, pp. 23-75

ration of the world and his rising to newness to herald the resurrection of the downtrodden. This hope is true because it rests on and grows from something God has done but which becomes our hope as we join in that deed and make it historically real. The hope of the new world is certified, verified, substantiated and materialised in the realization of particular historical hopes, no matter where or by whom. In the Spirit of Jesus released into the world, in the Spirit of truth and freedom that unceasingly disturbs and prods our history, we can work together, discovering and sharing as we go along common grounds and common hope.

The Bible as it stands now exhibits a process of growth (of itself and of reality) from Chaos to Cosmos (Gen. 1-2) to History (Gen 4, 12; Exodus 1-15; Kings; Prophets) to the Kingdom (the Gospels) to Completion (Rev 21-22). What is presented is not so much a *discovery* of the cosmos or the Kingdom or of meaning, freedom or truth. What is presented is rather a story of responsible, creative action, not only by God but by women and men made in God's image and entrusted with their own and the earth's destiny. Liberating truth is not given but made. It is not in the seeds and the beginnings, but in the tension between them and the future, the further possibility, that lies unnamed within them, struggling to realize itself. Truth consists in the creative action which intensifies the tension and transforms it progressively into reality. In that action it is known and named. In the making of history the truth of history is conceived, brought forth and recognized. The truth of God is experienced and spoken, obscurely always and haltingly, in the process of working with God in the construction of this history which is his and ours - till the shadows pass, and death shall be no more, and appearance and reality shall coincide, and God is with the people (Rev 21:1-7).

Believe the works

For the Bible as also for most people truth is not gnosis but deeds and relationships as well as the hope these bring forth and sustain. In the Old Testament Truth

is "rightness of life morally well-lived in accordance with the will of Yahweh"²³. John continues the tradition. Truth is something to be done (Jn 3:21); it is something to belong to and be partial to through faith and love (1 Jn 2:21-22; 3:19). It has to do with walking and life-style, and is identical with practical and concrete love for one another (2 Jn 4-6; 3 Jn 3-6). Life of love, deeds of concern and compassion, action for justice and freedom become, therefore, the revelation of truth and witness to God more persuasive than words. Such works are 'works of the Father'. And "if I do them", said Jesus, "even though you do not believe in me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10:37-38). For John to love God is to love Jesus is to keep his commandment is to love one another is to abide in the word is to know the truth is to be free (Jn 14:15,23; 15:12,17; 8:32). José Miranda argues for real identification of love and knowledge of God with "the moral imperative of justice and love of neighbour". He agrees with Bultmann that johannine 'truth' is "the reality of God" but insists further that "the reality of God is the summons, the word that calls for love and justice", and proceeds to speak of "the unpostponable imperative of good works in which God consists"²⁴. In the Gospel of Matthew too life giving works of justice and compassion are pointed to as witnessing to the truth and identity of Jesus' person and ministry (Mt 11:2-5). Matthew is so strong on this point that he concludes the great Sermon with a triple accent on doing the word received: it is not those who say, Lord, Lord, but those who do the will of the Father that belong to the Kingdom; mere hearing without heeding is like building on sand; the word heard becomes life-supporting truth and rock only when it is practised (Mt 7:21-27). In a stunning statement the author of First Timothy equates neglect of love and justice with

23. see the Jerusalem Bible, note to I John 3:19

24. Miranda, Jose P., *op. cit.*, pp. 137-145. See the entire chapter 7, pp. 126-153

apostasy. "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (I Tim 5:8) James concurs: faith without works is barren, dead, is a corpse, cannot save; it is no better than the faith of demons (James 2:14-26, cf. I Jn 3:17:18; Mt 25:34-46).

That means that "the praxis which transforms history is ...the matrix of authentic knowledge and the acid test of the validity of that knowledge". In the making of history are knowledge and truth made; and in the deed do word and faith become truth for others and ourselves²⁵. "Action leads to true knowledge"²⁶. The fact is that "human beings know well only what they do". To know is to love and to be committed. "True orthodoxy is orthopraxis"²⁷. Lash therefore maintains that "questions concerning the 'truth' of Christian concepts...cannot be adequately responded to merely in theory — in theological reflection. They are questions whose adequate response calls for the transformation, not only of theological description...but also of structures, activities and relationships..."²⁸ The message of the world's redemption, the news of a redeemed world, cannot simply precede and be independent of involvement and effort to liberate people and construct a redeemed world. The word and the flesh must coincide, and the word must flower forth from the flesh. Faith has to 'truth' itself historically²⁹. Only that liberation which has become an experience of the people gives authenticity to the proclamation of liberation³⁰.

25. Cutierrez, Gustavo, *The Power of the Poor in History*, New York, 1983 (Spanish original 1979) p. 59, 17)

26. Sean Kealy, Jesus the Unqualified Teacher, in *AFER*, 1977 p. 232

27. Gutierrez, Gustavo, *op. cit.* pp. 59-60, 16-17

28. Lash, N., *A Matter of Hope*, p. 75

29. cf Brown, *op. cit.* p. 254

30. Moltmann, Jurgen, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, London 1977, p. 207

To struggle for structural transformation is to "grapple with the practical problems ...of the organization of redemptive love". Hence we can neither postpone nor give up the struggle. To do so would be to betray christian hope. Those whose task it is to heal and make whole "cannot expect to be taken seriously if they do not show results. If it could be shown therefore that Christianity had not, in fact, effectively contributed to the liberating transformation of human structures and relationships, the legitimacy of Christian hope would already have been deprived of one of its necessary conditions". The point Lash makes here is consistent with his basic position that "'performance of christianity' is the fundamental form of the Christian interpretation of Scripture"³¹. James Cone argues in the same vein and shows how the truth of black preaching "was dependent upon whether the people received that extra strength to go one more mile in their struggle to survive"³².

The criterion with which to evaluate results and measure performance is, in the last analysis, the liberation of the oppressed. Is the message good news to the poor? Is it favourable to the lives of God's people? Does it enable them to go on living, struggling and hoping? It is with such questions that the people themselves will discern the truth of the message and the nature of the transformation it brings about.

The people

Being the revelation as well as the praxis of the truth which sets people free, Jesus relates directly to the oppressed who need liberation, the enslaved. In John it is sin that enslaves. But sin is that from which the cripple in John 5 is set free: disease, neglect and the sabbath law which includes the whole temple system. The chapter

31. Lash, N., *A Matter of Hope*, pp. 278-279, 61

32. Cone, James, *art. cit.* p. 39

shows that sin is whatever diminishes life and not merely some spiritual and interior reality. A similar liberation is effected in John 9: a man is freed from blindness as well as from the oppressive religious system. In Luke the relationship between the liberating truth of Jesus and the truth of the people is more directly and clearly stated. The truth is that Jesus has been sent to bring good news to the poor, to open prisons, liberate captives and set the downtrodden free (Lk 4:18).

A first and obvious fact about the people is that the vast majority of them in India and most parts of the world are powerless. They are victims of large-scale inequality and injustice which are pervasive and structured, and are "reflected in land-ownership, occupational structure, health care, political participation and education". The consequence of such inequality in poverty, meaning malnutrition for over 50% of the population, high incidence of disease and unemployment, high infant mortality, low productivity, illiteracy, indebtedness, bondedness³³. Christian stewardship of the truth that liberates demands that these sombre facts be faced, analysed and understood, and that action be taken with Gospel clarity and courage to tackle their causes.

But it is also part of the truth of the people that, whereas they have been absent for centuries from history, have been outcast, disallowed to speak, reduced to the status of objects of historical forces controlled by small power elites instead of being subjects and makers of their own life and future, they are now making their presence felt, are beginning to find their voice, and are demanding that they be named in the story. They are now re-reading history from where they are, with their own eyes and through the experience of their sufferings, needs and possibilities. An awareness is growing among them of their own resources of mind, inventiveness, organisation and solidarity. Are not the people, these illiterate

33. de Souza, Alfred, *The Relevance of Christianity in India Today* *Vidyajyoti*, XLVIII / 1, January 1984 pp. 4-25

ones, the inventors and architects of the world's languages — these complex, intricate, subtle, beautiful, powerful, spiritual-material media of personal expression, social communication and cultural advance, these unique symbols of the humanum! Their language, the food they produce, the roads and houses they build, their ancient inventions of wheel and fire and cultivation of grain and domestication of animals, organisation of society and education of the young, their reverence for life and endless toil form the basis of human existence in all its manifestations. But the social and political implications of this truth of the people have to be spelt out and honoured, if life is to be authentic and truthful.

Work by which we create a human world and recreate ourselves is part of the truth of the people. But part of it is suffering which does or could bind them in an ecumenism of pain which breaks some, brutalises a few, and refines and deepens many to become the foundations of a new world of fraternity and compassion. These vast masses of the powerless raise questions not about rituals and saints and theological niceties, but radical questions about economics and politics and their children's right to life; questions which are already making the religious problem profounder than ever and leading to a new understanding of the faith³⁴. If the Bible is to be credited, it is the questions of the people that God answers, and their cry God hears (Exodus 3). That God is on the side of the oppressed, and that the good news of the kingdom is addressed to them and that Jesus establishes a personal solidarity with the deprived and the downtrodden are essential dimensions of the truth of the people. If this is so, and if it is an aspect of the truth of Jesus, we must ask ourselves how we are going to confess this truth, how we are going to live it out and make it a reality of history. What restructuring of life and church is called for, and what rethinking of theology and preaching is demanded by the truth of the people?

34. Gutierrez, Gustavo, *op. cit.*, pp. 213-214

Since the good news has been addressed to the poor, it is theirs in the first place. They may, therefore, and in fact now they do, appropriate it and begin to experience it as liberating and life-giving. Addressed to them and their situation, spoken for their freedom and wholeness, the message is best grasped and interpreted by them with naturalness, spontaneity and depth from within the context of their sufferings and struggles. The more so since the contents of the Bible were the stories of the people for longer or shorter periods of time before they got written down. That is why it is best read and re-read by them, or through their eyes and experiences. The poor have a right to the Bible and to its liberating truth. They have a right to think and to reflect theologically, bringing the biblical memory of God to interact vitally and critically with the problems and pains of their own historical situation.

It is thus that the people come to discover that the true world is a promise of God's creative love struggling in the womb of an alienated history to grow, ripen and come to birth. They come to see that it is through their critical analysis and revolutionary praxis that the growth and the birth of Truth takes place, rather than through any number of general pronouncements by bureaus of truth. There is far more truth in people's struggles for justice and dignity than in many an abstract doctrinal formulation or ritual celebration of religion. In their uprisings and struggles and their affirmation of life and freedom, the confession 'Christ is risen' becomes truer than in the devotions of the powerful who would have the status quo continue keeping the people as cheap labour.

The elite in church and society often tend to ignore, obscure or distort the truth of the poor. Their healing can come only from honest contact on equal footing with the people. Once popular literature as well as papal documents used to refer to most non-europeans as "heathens, pagans, idolators, those who do not know God, those who live in darkness" etc. By Pius XII's time such terms had

almost disappeared, and Pope John eliminated them altogether. The way to this was prepared by the breakdown of a major portion of colonial prejudice and contempt, by a humbler and opener approach to the reality of others and by closer acquaintance with the great world religions. As a young priest Angelo Roncalli still used the old style. But he changed when as apostolic delegate in Turkey he had the opportunity to watch Muslims at prayer and to speak with them. From then on 'pagans' became brothers and sisters in one God and Father³⁵.

The ultimate criterion, theological as well as historical, for the quest of truth and for the church's practice in the world of socio-politics is the response given to the world of the poor (Mt 11:2-5). If the christian movement is committed to truth in its historical concreteness, it must support or refuse to support political projects in function of their advantage to the poor. This Gandhian moral talisman, this central biblical perspective, this single-heartedness, this purity and virginity are demanded of church and theology today. It is thus that the identity and transcendence of the truth of Jesus is safeguarded. Every project, socio-political as well as religious, is to be seen and judged from the point of view of the poor, and all movements of liberation that lead towards greater justice and dignity for the masses is to be sustained and counted as service of truth.

Archbishop Romero, martyr for the people's truth and freedom said: "By siding with the poor and tirelessly working to give them life, we shall learn what really the eternal truth of the Gospel is."

35. Bulmann, Walbert, *God's Chosen Peoples*, New York, 1982 pp.95-97, 102-108

Truth's Appeal for Gandhi

Students of India's achievements in the many fields of human knowledge are wont to sum up her entire history as a search for the true. This can be accepted as a justifiable summation of a people's accomplishments. The depth of knowledge arrived at in the various fields is perhaps one reason for the above observation. The more direct and explicit statements on truth, from the earliest available literature to quite recent writings, may be the other reason. In any case it is well known that the word Truth dominated the collective consciousness of the people of India in the most recent chapter of her history in a unique manner. This was chiefly because of that unique Indian, Gandhi. To trace certain aspects of Gandhi's fascination for truth, the way truth shaped his own life and that of a generation, is the scope of the following pages.

Uttering the words 'Ay Ram', Gandhi fell, pierced by an assassin's bullet. It was the end of his life, it was also the climax of a great experiment: in the words of Gandhi himself, an 'Experiment with Truth'. Gandhi described his own life and the history of his involvement in the life of the nation he led, as an experiment. He was involved in a great project. Some of the many aspects of this project are: overthrow of the colonial regime and securing of freedom for the country; ceaseless efforts towards a peaceful living together of the many religions of the country particularly of the Hindu and Muslim; restoration of the social, cultural and religious rights of the outcastes of India whom he called Harijan; educating a nation in a novel warfare called *satyagraha* and non-violence. The project also included the awakening and regeneration of the rural India and a critique of modern technological and commercial culture by means of the values he loved and fostered. And since these values are born of his deepest religious experiences and convictions,

and have influenced various aspects of modern life, a study of Gandhi's life as an experiment with truth can be quite instructive.

One cannot forget in this context the many criticisms to which Gandhi's approach has been subjected already in his life, and still more in recent times when efforts are being made to come to an objective and scientific assessment of his life and work. That he did not denounce feudalism and capitalism wholeheartedly, but on the contrary associated with him and his work persons known for their capitalistic interests, that inspite of his interest in the freedom of the untouchables he had conflicts with Ambedkar their leader, are among the criticisms. It is impossible to enter into every aspect of these problems, but in the light of the role he set for truth in his life and struggles even these criticisms can be reviewed.

One has also to recall here some of the implications of the term 'experiment'. In the field of empirical sciences, the term connotes a process. A partial glimpse of a law of nature or of certain properties of an object under study is followed up with further observations held under conditions which are controlled, organised, and arranged in such a way that one can get newer insights and fuller perception of laws of nature, and in this process discard, correct and complete earlier knowledge which one had. Certain unconditionality and openness characterise the 'experiments' in empirical sciences. But this is not the case as a rule in the field of religion where beliefs, traditions and practices, inherited from the past, are obeyed or enforced. Here God is immutable and unchanging; what he has revealed is eternal truth.

There exists a vital relationship between religion, and the socio-cultural behaviour pattern of a given society. Immutability, permanence and other attributes associated with Scripture, the notion of God, and the laws that govern the life of man, are carried over into the realms of the socio-cultural values as well. Fixation,

rigidity, traditionalism and other aspects of cultures are attributable to this link between religion and culture. Caste rigidity in India may be the best example.

To what extent did Gandhi's 'experiment' influence these realms and with what consequences? This is we would like to explore in these pages.

What caused the experiment

It was the experience of human degradation and enslavement that drove Gandhi to undertake the 'experiment with truth'. Political power in India was in the hands of the colonial rulers. Indian economic life was determined by and lay subservient to the colonial ideology. Education in India was skillfully being moulded by the rulers so as to serve the long range policies and objectives British planners had in conquering the country. Deep penetration of the Indian soul with a value system that suited most the conquerors had become an accomplished fact through colonial education. Indian religious traditions and values were being subjected to planned bombardment by the missionaries motivated by a narrow evangelism. This was of course reinforced by the rationalistic and commercial values that were flowing unhindered into the soul of the enslaved people. Even cultural norms and practices were being replaced by those of the conquerors. It was quite clear that practically every area of life in India was being influenced. To any reflecting Indian, enslavement, degradation, and humiliation had gone deep into the soul and made any reaction or response difficult.

Truth, as it came to young Gandhi

It was while contemplating possible responses to these and similar challenges which faced India in his time that Gandhi began to confront the voice of truth in his own conscience. His 'meat-eating' experiment, his experience of truth when he, as a young boy, confessed to his father that he stole his wrist-watch, and the inner awakening he had when the story of Harischandra formed within him an exalted idea of truth, were but heralds of the great love he was to have later on for truth in all its aspects.

Providence brought him in contact with sources that made it possible for the seed to sprout and grow. The Gita's new teaching that service done to another is nobler if even the least desire for reward is renounced, came to him as a demand of truth. The logic and sincerity which characterise the Sermon on the Mount were for Gandhi another dimension of truth. Jain and Buddhist teachings on truth and love for all forms of life were already part of his heritage. It was then that two prophets of modern culture, Tolstoy and John Ruskin, appeared on his mental horizon. Henry David Thoreau's reflections and action-programme left deep impressions upon the sensibilities of Gandhi.

Truth's sharpness to prune religion

It was at the level of the foundations, that is, of religion, that Gandhi began his work, his search for truth, his application of it and his critique of modern culture. It was primarily as a religious leader and practitioner that Gandhi appealed most to the people of India, the land of many religions. And what he did at this level amounted to an undeclared attempt at a redefinition of religion in all its essentials. A brief look at some of these will establish the truth of the statement.

With all religious leaders as well as believers Gandhi would reaffirm that the ultimate goal of human life in all its complexity and obscurity, is nothing short of the realization of God. But he differs from many on the question of the nature of God. Theorists on God are unanimous in stating that God is inaccessible, absolute, infinite, transcendent and beyond history. Quite logically symbolism is introduced as the only effective or successful means to establish any contact with that God. Hence it is that many religions circumscribe their existence and function in society by means of rituals and celebrations. Gandhi found these views quite illogical.

First of all he offers a methodological clarification. He admits that his is not the way of theorists and speculators, but that of the humble yet realistic practitioner:

"I am indeed a practical dreamer. My dreams are not airy nothings. I want to convert my dreams into realities as far as possible."¹ It is the fundamental insight of the Gita that was operative in this method: action is the law of God, of nature and therefore of man. It is through enlightened action and involvement that man discovers himself, finds the true meaning of life. It is through action that history moves to its goal and finds its meaning. This brought Gandhi to a very significant discovery characteristic of the Gandhian approach to life. Dismissing all claims to God-realization through extraordinary means, Gandhi held that it was through the relative and the limited that the Absolute is attained. Very early in his life Gandhi had come to the conclusion that Truth is God. God and Truth are interchangeable realities. Instead of stating that God is Truth, Gandhi preferred to make the more realistic statement that Truth is God. Now if Truth is God, that God can be attained through the exercise of truth in our life. It is because of this basic conviction that he made the following statement on the role of the relative in arriving at the Absolute, now defined as Truth: "But as long as I have not realized this Absolute truth so long must I hold by the relative truth. That relative truth must meanwhile be my beacon, my shield and buckler."²

The chief merit of this insight is a profound realism that enabled Gandhi, the *karma yogi* and initiator of movements, to accomplish so much that made history. Thereby he restored to every aspect of human life-struggle the value which it had but which got lost in the course of religion's alienating interpretations and practices. It is not necessarily through rituals, priests and temples, and through a proliferation of esoteric literature and practices that man finds fulfilment in God, and meaning in life. It is through life as lived in villages and towns, in the fields and factories that people begin to move towards the realization of the Absolute. This is the truth that Gandhi saw

1. *Harijan*, November 17, 1937

2. Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 19

as the essential insight of religion. God is attainable for all; the various *margas* are trimmed to size; rituals and other esoteric practices are given their minimum role; and the life-struggle of every man and every woman is now raised to the level of a supreme *marga*. In the words of Lanza del Vasto, "Truth is something that we have in us, and of which we are a parcel and a fragment. We hold a fragment of this truth in us and it is from within ourselves that we draw inspiration for our action. It is from this fragment of truth that Gandhi shaped his conduct, both personal and social."³

Service of man is dynamic truth

A significant corrective, so to speak, to religions in general, to Hinduism in particular, was made by Gandhi, following the same logic of truth, when he said that service of humanity is the way to the Supreme. If Truth is God, and if God can be arrived at by way of 'small truths, particles of truth', then, actions that embrace the widest possible area of service of one's fellow-beings, become the privileged place of the realization of God. Service of man thus renders one more authentically human. Gandhi states, "The immediate service of human beings becomes necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with Him. This can only be done by service of all."⁴

A recognition of the fundamental unity of all beings, especially of the entire family of man, as related to God, is basic to this insight. God is in His creation, especially in the history of man. Human society is today subject to many forms of evil and suffering. Evil and suffering are not only forms of untruth; they do conceal out the truth. Removal of these evils and sufferings is one objective in all forms of service.

Even this idea of service is not an abstract concept. The concrete geographical, historical and social situation

3. T. K. Mahadevan (Ed.), *Truth and Nonviolence*, Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1970

4. *Harijan*, 29, VIII, 1936

in which each woman and man is placed is a temple where God appears. This is made clear where Gandhi refers to the horrifying picture of the suffering people as the meeting place of God and human beings: "The picture of the crowd of men, women and children with their fleshless ribs...haunts me... My God is myriad-formed and while sometimes I see Him in the spinning wheel, at other times I see Him in communal harmony, then again in removal of untouchability; and that is how I establish communion with Him according as the Spirit moves me."⁵ Truthfulness to God in and through His creation made Gandhi feel that he could not find God as truth alone and apart from the rest of humanity. "I am part and parcel of the whole and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity."⁶ Services to one's fellow human beings are an act of truth, an experience of truth, in which one is already in touch with the source of all truth that is God; these will inevitably lead one to the full truth that is God.

Truth, non-violence and service of man

Oppression and enslavement of one people by another was the stimulus Gandhi had in his early days. Liberation of the enslaved became his challenge and his life-task. History had provided him with innumerable examples of one nation or people regaining their lost freedom through a process that led to violence and bloodshed. This offended the love and respect Gandhi had for truth. The process of liberation employed should be one that serves not only the interests of the enslaved but even those of the enslaver. This was his contention, as the logical consequence of his perception of truth as God and service of all as the surest way to the realization of God in one's life. Thus Gandhi came to forge the unique Indian weapon: conquest of violence in all forms by means of non-violence.

Pacifism had been preached by lovers of peace and fraternity. Gandhi was influenced by men like Tolstoy

5. *Harijan* 8, V, 1937

6. *Harijan* 29, VIII, 1939

and Thoreau. The latter had recommended a form of civil disobedience which had deeply influenced Gandhi when he contemplated ways and means of overthrowing tyranny, oppression and exploitation. But Gandhi went beyond them in so far as he traced the roots of non-violence to the transcendent dimension of man. Like the analysis of his great predecessor, Buddha, Gandhi came to realise that the economic, political, cultural as well as religious exploitation and injustice are all rooted in the interior of man. It is there that injustice, greed, unrighteousness, untruth, and all forms of evil breed and proliferate, leading to their externalisation in the various spheres of man's actions. Truest service of man is had when both the oppressor and the oppressed are led to a realisation of this truth. It is through non-violence that this goal is achieved. Non-violence is thus regarded as truth in the form of love.

Though expressed negatively, non-violence is basically love and regard for every one and for everything. Certain advaitic oneness is central to the concept of non-violence. It operates as follows: the realisation that the enemy or the oppressor too is in need of recognizing the truth about the fundamental oneness of all, prompts the oppressed to undertake a form of liberative struggle that will serve this objective. First of all there is the total repudiation of all forms of violence. Coercion or force, taking undue advantage of the weakness of the oppressor and pressurising him, are contrary to the notion and practice of non-violence. All forms of hatred of the oppressor also are foreign to the concept of non-violence. On the contrary one is invited to confront one's adversary with a readiness to acknowledge him as his equal, with a readiness to explore together as partners in a dialogue, so that he will come to a realisation of the chain that binds him to untruth and injustice. Gandhi formulates this as follows, "The way I am trying to follow is the way of love which is non-violence. Having belonged to the oppressor class and having by choice made the attempt to become one with the oppressed I have learnt that the true way of securing

justice is to inculcate mutual respect, in other words, to evoke the spirit of equality, of brotherhood, in the place of that of superiority...The so called 'inferior' class has to be taught not to scorn but to be induced to shed the fear that is born of a consciousness of inferiority."⁷

There are two consequences that are likely to result from this approach. First of all it enables the adversary to take note of these values which are given priority. This enables him to free himself from the complex of emotional entanglements, such as hatred, enmity, the desire for domination and exploitation. Once the adversary is out of these complex of hatred and other feelings, there is the next step open to him: release of the truth that is partially present in him. This is a consideration to which Gandhi gave supreme importance. He develops this theme further. In order to facilitate this release of truth, he recommends not only detachment but even voluntary suffering. The pain and a sense of humiliation the oppressor is likely to experience in such a context is voluntarily undertaken by the sufferer or the oppressed. Joan V. Bondurant, commenting upon this specifically Gandhian interpretation of suffering commends as follows: "Suffering is not valued for its own sake, but is held to promote non-attachment from the insistent claims of the body to emphasize the spirit as superior to the material and the physical. The self-suffering of *satyagraha* serves yet another function. It is effective to the extent to which it demonstrates the sincerity and cuts through the rationalized defences of the opponent."⁸ Truth will eventually win because it is the power that is derived from God Himself. Hence there is a certain invincibility that is associated with this force. Therefore Gandhi concludes as follows: "Indeed the acid test of non-violence is that one thinks, speaks and acts non-violently, when there is the gravest provocation to be violent. There is no merit in being non-violent to the good and the gentle. Non-violence

7. *Harijan*, October 26, 1934

8. J. V. Bondurant, *ibid.* p. 227-28

is the mightiest force in the world capable of resisting the greatest imaginable temptation. Jesus knew 'the generation of vipers', minced no words in describing them, but pleaded for mercy for them before the Judgment Throne, 'for they knew not what they were doing.'⁹ It was with this faith in the power of truth, that he undertook all his campaigns, knowing fully well that for the sake of the cause he espoused, he was prepared to die. When insulted and kicked by the white man in South Africa, when he was imprisoned in India, when confronted with the problem of Hindu-Muslim strife, it was clear that he wanted to entertain no hatred against his adversaries.

Gandhi was aware of revolutions inspired by short-lived ideologies. He knew that his approach was the more difficult and the more protracted. But he knew also that any action, be it a *satyagraha* or a fast for a particular cause, should benefit the greatest number of people at the deepest level possible. In the case of non-violence liberation of the oppressed as well as of the oppressor is possible because of the values implied and the method adhered to. This is service in a deep sense. It is through such service that Truth as God is attained.

This perspective of truth and service carried him still further. Having fought against racist oppression and injustice in South Africa, Gandhi came to India, where in the context of independence movement, he recognized colonialism as unjust and oppressive. Besides these evils there were others, more hideous and pernicious that called for action. Untouchability thus appeared to him as the worst evil Indian society suffered from. Having studied the evil at close quarters he came to the conclusion that, "All the misery in the world is born of the belief in inequality. Untouchability as Hindus practice it is its extreme form."¹⁰ Several years of his services were devoted to the tackling of this issue. But it is well known that his hands were tied here because of the scriptural sanction caste system in

9. *Harijan*, Dec. 19, 1936

10. *Harijan*, February 15, 1935

India was accorded. It was while engaged in this task of rehabilitating the Harijan, as far as possible, that a confrontation between Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhi became unavoidable. Within the limited scope of the present treatment it is impossible to undertake a full study of the entire development.

Truth, authority, scripture and tradition

India is a land of many world religions. Common to most of these religions is the special role a body of literature, called the Scriptures, plays in the life of the believers. They are of divine origin, and man is called upon to accept them and obey them unconditionally. Thus obedience becomes a very important aspect of every religion. In course of time the culture of a given group of people becomes deeply influenced by these demands. Conformism, submission and uncritical acceptance of all that pertains to the realm of religion, however distant they may be from the basic religious experience, invade the culture and become part of it. Indian cultural behaviour is largely influenced in this manner.

Gandhi's concept of service of one's fellow human beings and to the extent to which this affected the very idea of religion, was pointed out earlier. There is still one aspect that calls for our attention. Gandhi's insistence upon truth emboldened him to review some of these scriptural claims and express his opinion on them in the most fearless manner. This seeker of truth and of authenticity clearly declared that neither scriptural authority nor any form of sacred tradition is acceptable to him unless they conform to his conscience or reason, unless they coincide with what he fondly called his 'small inner voice'. It was his belief that it was through this inner oracle that God's voice came to each individual.

It is quite right to hold on to the primacy of conscience. But when the criterion is applied to the scriptural injunctions, the realm of what is known as revelation, one could expect difficulties. Such assertions will be regarded as an attack upon the revealed truths which are accepted

unquestionably, in faith. But Gandhi, true to his method, rejected total uncritical acceptance of scriptural authority. He says, "The *Smritis*, for instance, contain much that can never be accepted as the Word of God...The Scriptures properly so called can only be concerned with eternal verities and must appeal to any conscience, i.e., to any heart, whose eyes of understanding are opened. Nothing can be accepted as the Word of God which cannot be tested by reason or be capable of being spiritually experienced."¹¹ "Whatever falls from Truth should be rejected, no matter where it comes from..."¹²

Subsequent history has made it abundantly clear that it is statements of this kind that made him unpopular among orthodox Hindus. It cost him his life. But at the same time it is also quite clear how far Gandhi had travelled in committing himself to Truth as his only norm.

But if this norm alienated Gandhi from the orthodox Hindus, it brought him closer to other religions. For it is with the same criterion that he approached other religions. He was prepared to accept all that he found to be true in them. The basis for his fraternising efforts with the Muslims of India, and his attitude towards the Bible, both trace their origin to his concept of truth manifested through the 'small inner voice'.

Conclusion

It may be an impossible task to summarise the thoughts of Gandhi from any one single perspective. Yet it seems quite plausible to hold that it was through *Man* that Gandhi began his experiment with Truth, continued it and concluded it. Through human beings God came to him as Truth. For it was the experience of the misery, wretchedness, injustice and other forms of evil that provoked Gandhi to initiate the historic search. Liberation of people and service of people to achieve this great goal,

11. *Harijan*, July 18, 1936

12. *Young India* 29, IX, 1927 (Quoted in Arun Shourie, *Hinduism: Essence and Consequence*, Vikas Publishing House, Ghaziabad, 1979, p. 378)

became his chief concern. Everything began to be viewed from this stand point. While reflecting upon the role of the inner voice Gandhi always explained it in terms of the voice of the masses. The voice of the masses of the poor and illiterate Indians, with which his inner voice so often coincided, became for him the voice of God. This was also the basis for his popularity among the people.

It is from this point of view that Gandhi attempted a redefinition of the State, of industry and technology, and other aspects of modern culture. He believed that people should be given priority over a highly centralised state. It was his conviction that profit as a motive should be replaced by service of the greatest number of people, especially the helpless and the voiceless in the rural areas. The same conviction urged him to stress village self-rule over a highly centralised administration. This led him to the next important idea given wide currency in his lifetime, namely, the idea of trusteeship as opposed to capitalism, be it of the state or of private individuals. Again his concept of truth prompted him to condemn the evils of advertisement as well as of consumerism which it subserves.

In calling all these efforts an experiment with truth Gandhi sought to revolutionise the Indian soul. It was an invitation to every Indian to move away from the state of being settlers - in the field of religion, of tradition and custom - and to become voyagers once again. In the life of a voyager there is nothing that is established as permanent. He is on a voyage of discovery. Newer and fresher vistas are open to him every day of his journey. Gandhi may not have succeeded in all his undertakings. But the pattern he set for the Indian mind is quite clear and decisive.

Vidyajyoti

T. K. John

Delhi

Out of the Depths*

"Happy are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Take these words of the Gospel and compare them with the slogans of parties, of isms and ideological movements. We shall see that we are in different worlds which do not seem to meet. Happy are the poor?

Too often do we hear remarks about the poor such as, "They are poor because they are lazy, they shirk work, they have no brains. Oh! you know, they are ignorant, and unreasonable like beasts; they understand only the language of the fist." This litany could be extended with many more epithets of the kind. But are the remarks true? Are the words of the Gospel, then, no more than flowery language without substance? or a sort of pacifying jargon meant to dull our social conscience? Or, are these perhaps true rather than those remarks?

The Gospel is true; literally so. We know it. Our life as Little Brothers of Jesus would make little sense if we were not to bear witness to the truth of the poor and of the Gospel of Jesus. But to understand the "blessedness of the poor" and the beauty of poor women and men, we

*In two stories, culled from their rich experience, the Little Brothers of Jesus are letting us have a glimpse of the Truth of the People, of the resources of the Poor to build a new world. No rebellions and struggles are narrated. But the revolutionary element is in Chinna's spontaneous sharing and Gopal's tenacious faith in life. In the uncapitalistic heart of the one and the unfailing courage of the other lie the seeds of the new and equal world of tomorrow and the promise of the resurrection of the people. Editor.

must move beyond our defensive rationalizations, and descend to the depths of human experiences, and go into the world where the poor live, struggle and hope. Let us drop our oars, slow down and listen.

1. Pongal

It was Pongal last year. In our part of Tamilnadu harvest was meagre because of severe droughts in the two previous years. So last year's Pongal was more a formality than a festivity. There was nothing much to celebrate it with. We were invited as usual by our good friend Chinnakulandai on the evening of Perumpongal, the day on which new rice was to be cooked in new pots on the freshly painted threshold of the house.

Chinnakulandai is what we call a poor man. He lives on his labour in the fields. His wife too works as a hired hand in the fields like other working class women of the village. Their two sons have left the village for Madras where they work as casual labourers for low wages. Chinna's only daughter Lakshmi goes grazing their cattle with her younger brother who is a small kid.

We went into the house at dusk to share the festive meal. Chinna had already come in from the fields. Food was served on leaves stitched together. There was white rice and *sambar*; no *vadai*, no sweets, no vegetable curry. I did not realize for some time that Chinnakulandai had only rice and *rasam*. We were given the *sambar*. As guests we had precedence over the members of the household. We were served several rounds, and I ate my fill as a guest should. I did not realize that by doing so I was emptying the *sambar* pot! Right then one of the sons arrived from Madras for the feast. He had a small bag with him which he handed to his mother. He was served rice and *rasam*. After a few handfuls he stopped eating, obviously because he found everything insipid. Quietly, without making a fuss, the boy got up and washed his hands. All the while, Lakshmi and her brother were entertaining us with their pranks, and their parents livening up

the conversation with small chat about the fields, the beasts, and the weather in order, perhaps, to make up for the meagerness of the meal and, surely, to make us feel at home.

Then started the ritual. The mother opened the bag which her son had given her, and brought out some plantains, an apple, one or two *laddoos*, two cakes of *mysore pakku*, some puffed rice, betel leaves and areca nuts for chewing. That is what the boy had brought from the city. Good things at the sight of which all eyes lit up with joy. The woman started dividing up everything, the sweets, the apple, the plantains, the betel. With a big smile she gave us the best and the biggest portion and served the children next, some neighbours, her husband and her son and herself last. Nothing was stored away. Everything was shared.

An ordinary, banal, friendly evening - but inside me, back home, a world was breaking apart. Something stood revealed to me that shook my being and gripped me with an overwhelming wonder. I saw the widow of the Gospel, putting her coins into the temple treasury and Jesus standing by, watching that gesture with admiration, singing her praises. No discourses that evening, no discussions on sharing, but only familiar gestures, so familiar and simple that nobody would think that something great or out of the way was being done. In all my life, I, a christian, a religious who has taken a vow of poverty, have never made such a simple gesture of spontaneous sharing of everything! Blessed are the poor. We must not be taken in by the apparent simplicity of these words. Life to the poor is not an even song. It is a battle fought with all one's might. Peace is like a hard-earned meal. That is what Gopal, our neighbour taught us. Here is his story. It is literally true.

2. Leprosy

Two o'clock in the morning. It is quite dark. Out of the profound silence of the night rises a wailing cry from our neighbour's house. It is his daughter-in-law intoning a chant of lament, a mixture of grief and affection.

We knew the old man well. He had leprosy, and we were treating him for it. Being our neighbour, he would come in at any time of the day or night to tell us of his troubles and to show us the ulcers on his feet and hands and eyes. Then he would recount to us his life with all its misfortunes, joys and hopes...Here is a man, we used to tell ourselves, who has grown wise at a heavy price.

He was born, so he said, after a flood at the beginning of the century. He owned land, but sold it and tended the lands of a local brahmin. He married, but a son was born to him only after repeated pilgrimages to Lord Venkateswara of Tirupathi. He watched his two sons grow up, but all the while the shadow of the sickness that was to consume him was creeping upon him. We, Christians, talk easily of "losing one's life", but do we really know what it means? Gopal, the old man, knew what it meant though he never used our words. He lived it day by day as a poor leper.

What did he lose? First of all the certitude that he was the master of his life. For five consecutive years, he went to see the Lord of the seven hills to implore his mercy. Doing so he had lost some of his firmness and the pride of youth, but he had gained in faith in the all powerful God. Then it was leprosy. It ate him up. He had to lose everything. Fingers consumed by ulcers. Feet raw with wounds as their sensation diminished day by day. One foot would straighten, and this gave him the jerky gait of a manipulated puppet. Even his eyes were not spared. Ulcers attacked the cornea and eventually he completely lost the use of one of his eyes. I imagine myself surrendering without hope of restoration my hands, my feet, my feelings, my eyes; and I think of what it can do to my heart.

Gopal lost his cattle and his fields, because he himself could not work, and his sons were too young. Having lost the land he served a brahmin, a strict man, of his own age, who eventually became his friend. His younger

son ran away to the city after committing a petty theft in the village; he never came back. Gopal's elder son took to drinking and started abusing his father as a useless piece of furniture. Then the brahmin died, a robust man, Gopal's friend, leaving Gopal alone, who now was a body broken and decaying. Gopal's wife committed suicide. Her life had been hard and hopeless. She was torn between her love for the old man and for the elder son. She could not stand the violence of this son towards herself and her husband.

But the old man's heart kept beating to the rhythm of the inaudible music of his life. He became gentle, limping along behind his cows, shouting to get them back to the farm. He lived with his memories, awaiting the rains and the visit of his Lord. To the question, How are you? came always the only reply, "My time hasn't come". He had given up all, everything. That evening when he was already on his death-bed and in agony, and his grandson, unaware of the gravity of the moment yet conscious that something was going to happen to his grandfather, said to him to console him, "Don't cry, grandpa, when you will be going to the burning ground we shall all come with you",-Gopal's face lit up with a big smile.

So he died silently, having given all. His elder son cared for him lovingly throughout his long agony. Gopal died in peace. A wise man, shall we say? More than that. A poor man with whom Jesus identifies himself and whose agony Jesus makes his own. Gopal with no feet, no hands, no eyes. When his body was taken to the burning ground, all were there, as his grandson had promised. Gopal will not be proclaimed a Mahatma by the press or by an international jury or by a renowned film producer. But he was indeed a great soul. When he came to our house with his shuffling steps, poked around in the garden with his long stick, and sat on the only (wooden) bench in the house with obvious pleasure, we felt that we were privileged to sit near a man of peace. When he died it was like the collapse of the huge banyan tree of

the village, leaving a great empty hole against the sky. We believe that somehow he too belongs with the resurrection of the people.

Many such stories could be told of these beautiful people, of their longings and struggles for a better life, of the way they are used by the rich and the privileged, or exploited by parties, of how the landlords twist the laws of the land to their advantage, of the hard work and the skilful hands of the poor, of their refined culture with a hard outside and a gentle inside. We share the work with them, and the feasts, and the stories of gods and goddesses, and this all-pervading religious feeling and respect for life.

Alampundi,

The Little Brothers of Jesus

Tamil Nadu

